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BOYD BENEDICT LAY DYING ON THE DECK, WITH CLOTILDE BENDING OVER HIM.

Middy Herbert's Prize;

OR,

The Girl Captain's Revenge.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MIDDY," "THE
SHADOW SHIP," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE PIRATE LOVER.

A SMALL boat was creeping along the shores of the harbor of San Augustine, the single occupant rowing lazily, as though in no hurry, and his face as placid as a May morn, although he was a hunted man, and even then a danger lay before him that might cost him his life.

The man was dressed in the garb of a sailor, his face was weather-beaten, and his locks, hanging upon his broad collar, were white as snow.

His boat was a light one, and yet it seemed to move along as though age had not deprived the man of his muscular power.

Ahead, a heavily-wooded point jutted out into the water, and toward this the oarsman was pulling at his easy stroke.

Arriving there he sent his boat half its length out of the water, by one vigorous stroke of the oars, and then springing out, stepped into the shadow of the forest and stood as though in thought.

After a moment he passed on to the edge of the timber and glanced out upon the scene spread before him.

It was a pleasing one, for in a curve of the shore stood a pretty house, half hidden in foliage and surrounded by a flower-garden.

It was a cozy little cot, evidently the home of some one in the humbler walks of life.

Only a couple of hundred yards from the place, the man was able to discern a female form seated in the little arbor that stood upon the shore near the beach.

"Clotilde is waiting for me, and I must try and reach her side without attracting the attention of her mother," said the man who was watching the scene from his covert.

"Move and your's a dead man!"

The words broke crisply upon the ears of the one addressed, and with a start he turned quickly to behold a form near him, half concealed by the trunk of a large tree, and with a rifle leveled at his heart.

There was no mistaking the words of the man, and his appearance carried them out.

His face was a strong one, his form compact, and he wore the dress of a Government officer.

But, after his first start of surprise the old man seemed unmoved, even under the muzzle of the pistol leveled at him, but said calmly:

"Constable Clair, why do you seek my life?"

"Because, Benedict, I know you, even under your painted face, to make you appear old, and your gray locks.

"You are a pirate."

"Granted, and your son-in-law," was the cool response,

"Were you my own son I would do my duty and arrest you," and the officer spoke with deep feeling.

"You would see me hanged, ay, put the noose about my neck with your own hands, when you know that I love your daughter, and that she is my wife."

"You stole her love under the guise of an honest man, and then you kidnapped her from her home, nearly breaking the heart of her poor mother.

"I sought your hiding-place and found her, and she returned with me, when I told her that her mother's life would rest upon her head.

"You have followed her here, for I received your note to her, by accident, and read it, and then read her answer.

"She now awaits you yonder, little dreaming that I have awaited you here, and that I shall carry you to prison, and never rest until I hang you."

"Old man, I intended to lead an honest life, after Clotilde became my wife, and I left our little home to secure honorable work; but I returned to find that you had stolen my bride from me, and—"

"She was my child."

"And my wife; let her be the judge between us, and I will submit to her decision."

"Never! you are an outlaw, a price is set upon your head, and—"

"And you wish to earn the blood-money—but never!"

With the spring of a panther upon its prey, the man leaped forward and grasped the officer.

The finger of the latter touched the trigger, but the powder flashed in the pan, and the weapon was struck up, while, with a strength that was marvelous, the assailant grasped his enemy and drove deep into his heart the blade of a long knife.

The one who had slain him walked away from the spot, following the curving shore toward the little arbor before spoken of.

In its shelter sat a young girl, clad in pure white, and wearing a bunch of roses in her hair.

She was pretty, very pretty, innocent-looking, and yet her fine chin and flashing eyes denoted character beyond her years.

Now her face was pale and flushed by turns, as though she was excited from some cause.

Looking toward the distant town she seemed to be watching for some one to come from that direction, and started, when she heard a footfall behind her.

Starting back, as her eyes fell upon the form of the sailor, and his white hairs, a disappointed look covered her face, while she cried:

"Oh, sir, do you bring me a message from—"

She paused, evidently embarrassed, and the man said:

"Clotilde, I bring myself."

"Oh, Boyd!" and the young girl threw herself into his arms. "Who would know you in that white rig and painted face, for it is painted?"

"It is, Clotilde; but you know I cannot go without a disguise, as there is a reward out for your pirate lover."

"And husband, Boyd; but, oh! that you were not guilty."

"Old Nick is not as black as he is painted, my pretty wife; but I have come for my little bird that was stolen from her cage."

"My father told me my mother would die, and her death be upon my head if I did not return, so I came, Boyd; but mother treats me most unkindly, now I am here, and so does father, and several times they have said they wished they could catch you, so as to hang you and get the reward offered for you dead or alive, and I do wish you would take me far from here where they would never find me."

"I will, Clotilde, and this very night."

"You must be very careful, for father is not in town, as I thought he would be, when I wrote you what hour to come, for I saw him go toward Magnolia Point an hour ago, and carry his rifle."

"He has doubtless gone squirrel-hunting, Clotilde, and will not return very soon, so I can have a long talk with you about my plans for the future, and in which I need your help."

"You shall gladly have all the aid which I can give you, Boyd, so let me know just what you have determined upon, and I will do what you wish; but I sincerely hope you are not going back to the wild life you once led, and which branded you as a pirate."

"Clotilde, I need gold, for a man in poverty might as well be dead."

"I expected to go, as you know, as first luff under the noted pirate chief who bore the unenviable name of the Sea Monster; but my plans, as you are also well aware, fell through, and the captain was shot or drowned when making his escape some time ago, and his fate led me to try and lead a less dangerous life and turn smuggler; but your father came and stole you from me, and now I have another plan which I wish to make known to you, and if it is successful we will be as rich as a king," and the man's eyes sparkled with anticipation, while his pretty wife waited impatiently for him to tell his story of how wealth would come to them.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF THE LOVERS.

THE man who had so summarily slain the constable, when the latter had, as he believed, every advantage over him, was, as the reader has surmised, by no means the aged individual his snowy locks and weather-bronzed face indicated.

He had painted, or dyed his face to look bronzed and weather-beaten, and his white hair was a neat wig, while his gait and stoop were feigned.

Divested of disguise and standing erect, he was a fine-looking, sun-browned young sailor of twenty-eight, with a reckless face and dashing air that were very attractive.

In fact the two, the girl and her pirate husband, were certainly a handsome couple, but, as she sat by his side in the little arbor, grasping his hand, she little dreamed that that very hand had, only a few moments before, driven a knife-blade into her father's heart.

That the young sailor was sorry that it was

so, there was no doubt, but it had been his life, or the constable's and in slaying the latter he had removed a very dangerous enemy.

The husband and wife had met a year before, when the young sailor had resented an insult offered the young girl by a party of carousing seamen, while she was looking for her father in the lower walks of the town.

His good right arm had placed a number of them prone upon the ground, and offering himself as an escort to the lady he had so well served, he had accompanied her to her little home just out of the town limits.

From that day the two had been lovers, but the sailor, like his kind, ever fickle, had tired of his sweetheart, and plotting to cut out a Government cruiser, and join the pirate known as the Sea Monster, in sailing the seas under the black flag, he had decided to desert the fair Clotilde Clair.

But hers was not a nature to submit tamely to slights, and she had, upon learning of his intention, put the young commander of the cruiser upon his guard, and the result was a disastrous failure upon the part of the pirates, the capture of the Sea Monster, and a narrow escape from death of her lover.

Suspecting the cause of their failure, the young sailor felt that he had a dangerous foe in his discarded sweetheart, and needing her aid in rescuing the Sea Monster and other prisoners, he went to her with a story that caused her to believe that she had wronged him, and gladly she had atoned for her act by aiding in the rescue of the pirates, which, as the constable's daughter, she was able to do.

The escaped Sea Monster, however, having been either shot or drowned, the young pirate lieutenant had run off with Clotilde, married her, and then had her kidnapped from him by her father.

Realizing the great service she could be to him, and becoming again infatuated with her, he had sought her out in her home at the risk of his life, to enlist her in a new enterprise that he had on hand, and which will now be developed by his story to his wife.

Boyd Benedict, knowing well that he must not allow Clotilde to become aware of his dark deed, committed among the magnolias half an hour before, was anxious to get her away from her home before the discovery of the constable's death should be made.

Once she was aware that her father had died by the hand of her husband, she would become as revengeful as an Indian, the young pirate well knew, and kill him or cause his arrest without one atom of pity, for hers was a strange nature, as he had had reason to find out.

"Well, Boyd, what is the plan you have on hand?" asked Clotilde, as the man sat a moment in deep thought.

"Well, Clotilde, I will tell you, and at once, for what I have to do, I cannot delay in."

"Do you remember an old sailor with gray beard and hair, who was known as Old Mystery?"

"Yes, and he always spoke in a whisper and looked about nervously, as though he expected to be surprised."

"That is the man, Clotilde; well, he got his

name by continually hunting at a secret which he knew, and would never make known.

"Some days ago Old Mystery got into trouble over a game of cards, and he would have been killed, had I not gone to his rescue.

"The old man seemed to be childishly grateful for what I did, and in return for my service to him, came to me with his secret."

"His secret?"

"Yes, the one he has hinted at for the past ten years among his messmates."

"And he told it to you?"

"Yes."

"And am I to know, Boyd?"

"You are, Clo', as I wish you to help me in it."

"I will do all that I can, Boyd; but what was Old Mystery's secret?" asked Clotilde, with all the curiosity of her sex excited to the utmost.

CHAPTER III.

OLD MYSTERY'S SECRET.

"THE secret, Clotilde, which Old Mystery has carried so long locked in his heart, is just this: *he knows where a pirate treasure is buried*," said Boyd Benedict, with the air of a man who knew that his words would create a sensation.

"Ah, Boyd!" fairly gasped the young wife, turning pale at the thought of such knowledge being held by any one, while visions of diamonds, rubies and luxuries untold arose before her eyes.

"Yes, Clotilde, Old Mystery's story is just this, and his secret is a most valuable one indeed; but it is yet to be discovered just what it amounts to.

"You have heard of Morgan the outlaw?"

"Oh, yes! and what a terrible pirate he was."

"Terrible, indeed, and one who gained the riches of kings through his piracies.

"Now Morgan had a young lieutenant, Old Mystery says, that ran off with all of his chief's treasure, and, afraid to land with it, at any point, he cruised about the seas, until he was one night wrecked upon an island in the Gulf."

"An island, and on the Florida Coast, Boyd?"

"That I do not know, Clotilde; but it was either one of the Chandeleurs, or one of the Florida Keys, or an island of the Bahamas."

"A rather large number to select from, Boyd," said Clotilde with a look of disappointment.

"True, Clotilde; but then I have a correct picture of the island, from two of its sides, the north and south, a chart of its surroundings a league around it, and the channel leading into it, and a drawing of the spot where the treasure lies.

"It was called Pirates' Island, from the fact of its having been the resort of buccaneers; but no one knows of it, or at least as the burial-place of a vast treasure."

"But Old Mystery knows?"

"He knows just this, Clotilde, and no more.

"He says that he learned of the hidden treasure through an old sailor comrade of his, who was wounded in a combat and died in his arms.

"This old man told Old Mystery, who was

then comparatively young, that he had been wrecked on the island with Morgan, pirate lieutenant, and was the only one to escape, as he had clung to a spar, and, after drifting to sea for two days had been picked up by a vessel.

"He had gone, a year after, to the island, accompanied only by three comrades, and they had gathered up the treasure and buried it, intending to return with a larger craft and carry it away.

"They had taken with them ample gems, to sell for gold, for their immediate needs, and, after drawing sketches of the island, studying the channel to run in, and taking soundings, they had departed in their little sloop.

"But sickness had overtaken them at sea, and Old Mystery had buried his three comrades, and alone, after terrible suffering and delays, reached port.

"With the gems, which he and his comrades had brought with them, and all of which he had, he had entered upon a life of dissipation, instead of buying another vessel and shipping a crew, to go back to the island, and the result was that he thus let years slip by, and did not return.

"At last he took a coast smuggler into his confidence, and the man fitted out his craft, got a small but good crew from the Reef Pirates, and set sail for the Gold Island.

"Among the crew was an Indian, who had been chief of a band of the Pasquagoulas; but who was a perfect seaman, and knew the coast thoroughly.

"He had been unfriendly with the Reef Pirates, as they had, on one occasion, attacked his village, burned it, and murdered his people; but he had, the smugglers thought, buried the hatchet, and was taken along for the cruise.

"Old Mystery told me the Indian called himself after the name of his tribe, Pasquagoula, and was a superb specimen of manhood, while he was a perfect sailor, and would stand at the wheel twelve hours at a stretch, and not ask to be relieved.

"This the lazy crew liked, and the Indian was taking a trick at the wheel nearly all the time.

"The craft was a coasting schooner, clumsy looking, but stanch and fast, and besides the captain, Old Mystery and the Indian, there were five in the crew, which would be enough, they thought, to divide the treasure among, large as it was represented as being."

"And it was said to be vast, Boyd?" asked Clotilde, listening to the story with the deepest interest.

"Yes, indeed, Clotilde, for Old Mystery says that it was a ship-load, so his old shipmate had told him, and consisted of gold, silver, jewels, trinkets, and booty in vast quantity and of great value.

"I tell you, we will be richer than England's king if we get it."

"But did not the Reef Pirates git it when they went with Old Mystery?"

"No."

"That was strange; but how did it happen that they did not?"

"I will tell you, Clotilde, and must hasten on

with my story, for what we do, must be done at once.

"I have told you the secret of Old Mystery, and now I will tell you about his second cruise in search of the Pirates' Island; but you do not fear that your mother may come here in search of you?"

"No, for she has gone over to a neighbor's; but I fear father may return, and he would come this way from the forest."

"No, he will doubtless remain until night-fall," was the cool answer; but the slayer of the man of whom he spoke slightly shuddered, and cast a quick glance toward the magnolias, as though the scene therein, with the form of his wife's father lying dead beneath their sheltering branches, had flashed with painful vividness before his mind.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INDIAN SAILOR'S REVENGE.

CONTINUING his story as it was told him by Old Mystery, the sailor, Boyd Benedict went on:

"The craft sailed with the treasure-seekers, Clotilde, and all were in high glee at the prospect before them.

"But from their reaching blue water, the weather turned against them, and they were compelled to reef down and make all snug below and aloft for a rough time.

"Storm followed storm, and they were blown hither and thither, off of their course, and then compelled to scud for two days before a gale.

"Some were in favor of giving up the expedition, saying that the Fates were against them.

"But Old Mystery urged them on, and the captain came to his aid, while the Indian told them it was a legend of his people, that bad luck and death came to those who sailed upon the sea for a certain purpose, and then gave it up without accomplishing it.

"The result was that the vessel held on its way, and at last reached the collection of islands, amid which was situated the one whereon was hidden the pirates' treasure.

"The weather had become clear, and it was hoped that now they would have no more trouble; but, when in a position of danger among the islands, a storm arose, and Old Mystery, who had sighted the island, and pointed it out to his comrades, told them that it would be madness to attempt to reach it in that blow.

"The Indian, as was almost always the case, was at the helm, and upon going to relieve him, Old Mystery said he refused to allow him to do so, telling him that he would steer the vessel.

"Old Mystery says that he had felt sorry for the way in which the captain and crew had imposed upon the Indian, who appeared to be a noble fellow, and he had frequently urged him to let him help him at the helm.

"This the red-skin had appreciated, and the two had become good friends.

"Learning from his messmates that they did not intend to allow the Indian an equal share in the treasure, Old Mystery had urged against their act, but to no avail, and he determined to stand by Pasquagoula in asserting his rights.

"Now, as he approached the Indian to relieve him at the helm, the latter refused to give it up.

"But Old Mystery took his stand by him, and, in a low tone, told him what was the intention of the crew regarding him, and added that he intended that they should not cheat him, and, before he showed them the hiding-place of the treasure, he would make them swear to give Pasquagoula his share.

"The red-skin seemed greatly pleased at this, and said:

"'Pale-face man my friend; let him stay by rudder-stick with me, and wait for dark to come.

"'Indian no fool; have heap sense.'

"Well, Old Mystery did as he was told, and aided the Indian at the helm.

"Then the storm increased, and night came on, while the captain and crew became greatly alarmed.

"But the two helmsmen held their own, and guided the little vessel as best they could among the dangers about them.

"Soon the Indian left Old Mystery alone at the tiller and went amidships, where he had his own canoe made fast, for he had brought it on board.

"It was lying bottom up between the masts, and was lashed to the deck.

"In the canoe were fastened the sails, paddles and rudder, with other things, which were securely bound up.

"The Indian bent over his canoe for a time, Old Mystery watching him the while, though the crew paid no attention to him.

"Then he came aft once more and resumed his place at the tiller.

"The craft was now driving along through the darkness under reefed sails, and the wind was increasing in fury.

"About them were reefs and rock islands, so that the open water was scarce, and any moment the vessel might strike.

"'Pasquagoula friend go and stay by canoe. Wait for Indian,' said the red-skin to Old Mystery, who obeyed in silence, though what prompted him to do so he says he never knew.

"He found that the canoe had been freed from its deck-lashings, and was about to return and tell the Indian so, when suddenly a wild roar was heard ahead, the bows of the vessel went high in the air, and then came down with a quick and sickening sensation.

"Next followed a terrific shock that threw every one to the deck, while the crashing of timbers showed that the vessel had been literally broken in twain.

"Down came the masts, rigging and all, and the wreck was complete.

"In that terrible moment, Old Mystery says he felt his arm grasped and heard the Indian say:

"'Help quick! get canoe over side!'

"Instantly he did as directed, and hardly knowing what he did or how it all happened, he found himself seated in the canoe, which was riding the waves like a feather, the Indian in the stern, paddle in hand, guiding its course.

"Screams for help came from the wreck, a continued crashing was heard for a while, and then the cries ceased, ending in shrieks of de-

spair, as the hull went to pieces and the crew were left helpless in the mad waters.

"But above all arose a wild war-cry, the triumphant yell of Pasquagoula, who explained to the amazed seaman that the Reef Pirates whom he had destroyed had been his bitter foes, having, with others, gone to his village and slain his people, robbing them and burning their lodges.

"All night long, Old Mystery said, they were dashed about in the light canoe; but with the dawn the Pirate's Island was sighted and they landed there, and he showed the red-skin the hiding-place of the outlaws' booty.

"Pasquagoula had fitted up his canoe with what provisions he could hide in it, and, unable to carry but a little gold with them, they determined to return to some port, buy a vessel, and again come for the treasure.

"When near the land, one night, Old Mystery says, he accidentally fell into the sea, while the Indian sat at the tiller, asleep, for he was worn out.

"He had sunk deep, and upon arising, saw the canoe gliding rapidly away, Pasquagoula still asleep, from fatigue.

"But, though he hailed loudly, he was not heard, and the canoe glided on out of sight and disappeared.

"Old Mystery was a brave swimmer, and he saw that his only chance was to reach the land.

"It was a desperate struggle; but he made it, and crawling out upon the beach he fell down utterly exhausted.

"Then it was that he saw the Indian cruising about in search of him, having awakened from the deep sleep he had fallen into, to find him gone."

"But Old Mystery was too utterly prostrated to call aloud, and the canoe passed on down the coast."

"And the old sailor?" asked the young wife, who had listened with the deepest attention to all that had been told her by her pirate husband.

"Well, it seems that Old Mystery suffered fearfully, before he at last wandered, more dead than alive, into a habitation on the coast.

"Believing that the Fates were against him he dare not make another attempt to seek the Pirates' Island, and thus allowed years to pass away.

"Now he is anxious to go there, has told me his secret, and wishes to give me the gold in return for the service I rendered him."

"Oh! will it not be grand if we can only be rich!

"Father, and mother, too, will forgive me then, and I will make them so happy in their old age, with a beautiful home," cried Clotilde, completely carried away with enthusiasm at the prospect of untold wealth.

"It will indeed be grand, Clotilde, and I intend to start at once upon the work of securing the treasure, and you must help me."

"I will do all in my power, Boyd, but what can poor little me do?"

"You can do a great deal, if you will."

"I will, I assure you, so map out my work, captain," she said pleasantly, and the young

pirate began to unfold his plan of action to gain possession of the treasure on the fateful island.

CHAPTER V.

THE PLOT FOR A WOMAN'S AID.

"You see Clotilde," began Boyd Benedict, with another hasty glance over toward the magnolias. "Old Mystery has grown almost childish after his numerous hardships and disappointments, and he really has *forgotten where the Treasure Island is.*"

"Forgotten?"

"Yes, he had lost it."

"But surely he knows about where it was?" anxiously asked Clotilde.

"No, he does not know whether it was one of the Chandeleurs, or on the Florida Coast, or among the Bahamas."

"This is remarkable, Boyd."

"Yes, but it can be found, for he thinks it was among the Bahamas, and knows about the time it took him to go there."

"He has a chart of the waters about it, a map of the island, with the hiding-place of the treasure and all, and what is better still, a correct picture of the isle from the north and south views."

"With these in our favor, and the fact that Old Mystery goes along, and may recall scenes as we cruise about, I believe the island can be found."

"I hope so, Boyd."

"Well, there is no harm in the search, especially as it will not cost us much."

"You will have to purchase a vessel, Boyd."

"Oh no, for I can get one in a cheaper way."

"Ah! but how?"

"You know that a craft came into port some time ago, which was known as the Flagless Schooner?"

"Yes! it was an armed craft, and belonged to a youth who had captured her from a pirate, I believe."

"That is the craft, Clotilde, and the owner's name was Mark Bonodel."

"I met him, and a handsome young man he is."

"You met him?" quickly asked Benedict, with something like jealousy in his tone.

"Yes; for he came here to get father to put an officer and some men on board, to keep the schooner, as he discharged his crew and had presented his vessel to the Government, and wished it held until it was taken possession of."

"I knew that one of your father's officers was on board, with half a dozen men; but I did not know that you had seen Bonodel."

"Yes; and he told us something of his life, and how a man had destroyed his happiness by killing his father, driving his mother to die a pauper, and stealing his little sister and sending her off among strangers."

"The young captain had gone to sea, to make money and try to find his sister, and after some years had got a position ashore with the very man whom he so hated, and, in the end, had slain him."

"Chance put it in his power to get possession of the pirate schooner, and in it he went on a cruise in search of his sister and found her on

one of the Wreckers' Islands among the Bahamas.

"So he gave his vessel to the Government and departed with his sister, my father urging him to do so, as he might be tried for his confessed killing of his old enemy, who was a rich money-lender in New Orleans.

"His schooner father has charge of, and that is all I know of the young captain."

"It is enough, Clotilde, for my purpose, for that is the schooner I intend to seize."

"Oh Boyd!"

"Fact! for as the craft was successful in the search for the girl, it is a good omen that it will be in the search for the lost Treasure Island."

"But how will you get possession of it, Boyd?"

"I wish you to go to the cottage, get your things on, and what you care to take with you, and then go to the town, arriving there about nightfall."

"Well?"

"You know the officer in charge of the schooner?"

"Yes."

"He knows you?"

"Oh, yes, and has since I was a little girl."

"Good! now you tell him your father wishes him to come at once to his cottage to see him, and to bring two of his men."

"You can also add, that as they are to bring some provisions back, and your father will accompany them, that you will remain on board until their return."

"But, Boyd—"

"Listen, Clotilde, to all of my plot."

"Soon after they have gone I will come out with a boat's load of men, which you will tell those on board is the party returning, and then you are to go into the cabin."

"I will board and carry the schooner, get up anchor and sail and run out, a second boat's load of men joining me a league down the coast."

"Now what do you think of my plot, Clotilde?"

"It is a bold one, and just like you, Boyd."

"And will succeed."

"So I think, and without bloodshed, which I abhor; but what you do must be done at once."

"Yes, and I will be off."

"But the crew?"

"Are all ready, waiting my return."

"Then I will not be the one to fail you, Boyd, and I will start at once," and the husband and wife parted, the latter going to her cottage home, the former making his way back to the magnolias, past the prostrate form of the constable, and thence to his boat, into which he sprung and pulled rapidly away.

CHAPTER VI.

CLOTILDE'S MISSION.

In the harbor of San Augustine lay a very pretty craft at anchor.

She was armed, gaunt, trim alow and aloft, and looked like a vessel that could show a clean

pair of heels to an enemy, overhaul a clipper, ride out a gale with ease, and sail under a mere breath of wind.

Upon her deck were seven men visible, one of them pacing the quarter-deck with the air of one who felt his importance.

A glance at this individual was sufficient to show that he was no sailor, though he aped the free-and-easy air of one.

He was fat, red-faced, and pompous, and wore a sailor hat set upon his bullet-like head, and which had evidently been borrowed for the occasion, for he had been put on board with a small crew, as a guard of the schooner.

The sight of salt water fairly made him seasick, but there, while the vessel was at anchor he was all right; but should she get under way, he would have hastened ashore with ludicrous alacrity.

But it must not be supposed that Under Constable Jonathan Jenks was any coward, for he was not, when ashore; for there he had proven himself as brave as a lion, and he was more feared than was his superior officer, the head constable.

Yet afloat, Officer Jenks was not at home, and he knew it.

His men were distributed here and there about the schooner, some smoking, some idling, and one busy in mending his clothes.

Ever and anon as he paced the deck, Constable Jenks would raise a glass to his eyes and turn it upon the town, with the air of one who was raised to just such work, and then resume his walk once more.

In one of these glances his eyes fell upon a boat putting off from the shore.

It was growing dark, but the constable could see that the boat held two occupants, and one of these was a woman.

Straight for the schooner the boat was headed, and, as it drew nearer, the constable called out in tones that he meant to be thoroughly seamanlike:

"Ho, boat! ahoy! ahoy there!"

"Ay, ay, Constable Jenks, I am coming on board to see you," came back in a voice that was silvery and ringing.

"Clotilde, as I live!" muttered the constable, as he recognized the voice, and even in the gathering gloom it could be detected that his face flushed crimson.

Now it must be confessed that the constable was a bachelor, and had been very sweet on Clotilde, the pretty daughter of his chief, since she was a wee girl, and it had hurt him badly when she ran off with Boyd Benedict.

Returning to her home once more, he hoped that she would forget her husband and in time love him; for he said:

"I shall make a widow of her, as soon as I can get the noose about that boy's neck, for he deserves hanging."

"Now, at her coming out to the schooner, he was immensely tickled; but his good sense told him that she was the bearer of a message from her father, for the constable frequently sent Clotilde upon important errands, he knew.

"Come on board, Miss Clotilde, and welcome, such as an humble sailor can give you," said Jonathan Jenks, feeling that Clotilde would be

impressed by his position as commander of the schooner.

"My dear Captain Jenks, I thank you," said Clotilde, as she took his hand and sprung to the deck.

"Will you enter *my* cabin, lady?" and Jonathan Jenks felt his importance more and more, as he led the way to the pretty cabin of the schooner.

There, Clotilde saw that the land-lubber commander *pro tem.* of the schooner had been putting on a warlike air, for he had cutlasses and pistols scattered about, as though ready at hand for any emergency.

"Be seated, lady," said Jonathan affectedly, placing an easy-chair for Clotilde, while he added:

"And allow me to offer you a glass of wine?"

"No, thank you, *Captain* Jenks," and Clotilde emphasized the title. "I have come upon an errand."

"Indeed, and from your good father, Miss Clotilde?"

"I have come to tell you," continued Clotilde, evasively, "that you are to take three of your men, and go at once out to father's home."

"I came out in a shore boat, which you can return in, and the oarsmen will land you where you wish."

"Certainly, Miss Clotilde; but is there any trouble with the chief?"

"There are some men to come on board the schooner, and to be kept here, Captain Jenks."

"I see, I see! some whom your father does not wish to commit at once to the jail."

"And, I will await your return here, and then will have to ask you to escort me home," said Clotilde with one of her sweetest smiles.

At this Jonathan Jenks was delighted, and calling his men he ordered them to get their arms and be ready to accompany him ashore, adding:

"Now, Miss Clotilde, I leave you commander of the schooner, and should the crew not obey you I will have them hung at the yard-arm upon my return," and Jonathan Jenks looked fierce, and as though he meant what he said.

A moment more and he and his three men were in the boat rowing shoreward.

After they had gotten out of sight, Clotilde suddenly called to two of the men and said:

"I have forgotten to tell Captain Jenks to go out by the old chapel, where he was to be joined by some one else, so please jump into the boat alongside and row after him."

"Yes, lady, but if he has landed, where will we find him?" answered one of the men politely.

It was Clotilde's desire to get the men out of the way, for fear they might foolishly resist the boat when it boarded and thus cause bloodshed, and she was only sorry she could not send the three men off on the errand; but this she dared not do, so she said:

"You will go by the Anchor Inn, and if he has left there hasten on out to my house, until you see it will be impossible to overtake him, and then return; but if you overtake him tell him to go at once to the old chapel, and thence to join my father."

"Yes, miss," and taking the shore-boat alongside, and which Constable Jenks made use of,

instead of one belonging to the schooner, the two men started upon their aimless errand, never once doubting the good faith of their chief's pretty daughter.

CHAPTER VII.

IN A PIRATE'S POWER.

CLOTILDE waited until she saw the boat recede from sight in the gloom, for it was now dark, and then she glanced toward the last man left upon the schooner.

He stood not far away, leaning over the bulwarks, and apparently gazing at the lights of the town; but his eyes were fixed upon the maiden.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, and one whom Clotilde now recognized with a start, for she had once had a scene with him, when, to her amazement, he had one day confessed his love for her and asked hers in return.

The man had been polite, and took his rebuff in silence; but a wicked smile had crossed his lips as he turned away, and that smile she had remembered.

She had told her father of the circumstance, and he had said that the man was a reformed pirate, and one who was his trusted spy, and for that reason he cared not to quarrel with him, so would pass over the affair, but for Clotilde to avoid him all in her power.

Now, as she stood alone upon the deck with him, she felt a feeling of awe, for she remembered that wicked smile, and had involuntarily placed herself in his power.

With an apparent indifference she turned and walked toward the cabin, and entering it, threw herself into an easy-chair.

Presently she glanced upward, and again started, for she beheld the eyes of the man looking down upon her.

She had heard no step above her head, and yet he had reached the place from whence he could see her.

He had dodged back as she looked up, as though he did not wish to be seen, and when Clotilde looked again his face was not over the open skylight.

She now regretted that she had sent the other two men away; but she had done so, wishing to avoid bloodshed.

It was certainly time for her husband to come with his crew; but they could not yet be in sight, or the man on deck would hail the boat, she thought.

Clotilde was a brave girl, and she had passed through many dangers; but now she grew nervous, and she fairly trembled as she beheld the man descending the companionway.

"Well, sir, do you wish to see me?" she asked, haughtily, assuming a calmness she did not feel.

The man was tall, with great broad shoulders, a full-bearded face and eyes that were black and restless.

He looked like one who should wear epaulettes on his shoulders rather than be holding the rank of a common hireling under her father, for about him there was an air of dignity and conscious power.

"Yes, fair Clotilde, I have come to speak with you upon a subject very near my heart,"

he said, in a voice that was low and by no means unpleasant.

"Silence, sir! for you know that you address another man's wife," said Clotilde, in icy tones.

"True, you are now the wife of Benedict the Buccaneer," was the answer, in a sneering tone.

"I am the wife of one I love, sir, and I will not have you speak of my husband in a tone of disrespect."

"When I first told you of my love, Clotilde, you were not married; but, though you spurned me—"

"I did not spurn an honest love, but would give my full sympathy to one thus loving with no hope of return; but you I could not care for, nor could I trust, and I told my father that you had, without being even my friend, sought to force me to become your wife."

"Yes, and he has since treated me with unkindness; but this meeting now makes the past even, for, though you are married I love you, and, as soon as I can make you a widow, you shall become my wife."

He spoke calmly, and in a way that told Clotilde that he meant just what he said; but she kept up a stout heart, and said haughtily:

"My father shall know of this insult to his daughter, sir."

"Bah! you talk like a child, for, let me tell you, in placing me on board this schooner as a guard, your father did the very thing I wished, for he has enabled me to gain possession of her, and even now I have half a hundred gallant tars pulling for this craft, and within two hours she will spread her white sails, and with me as her commander, will speed away upon an errand that will bring me riches untold."

"Listen to me, girl, for I love you, and I will make you as rich as a queen."

He moved toward her as he spoke, but she started back and seized a cutlass, while she cried:

"Stand back, sir, or I will cut you down!"

The man started, but it was not on account of the blade that confronted him, held in a girl's hand.

A sound reached his ears from without, and he started on deck with the cry:

"Ha! I hear the splash of oars and my men are already here!"

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO PRIZES TAKEN.

WHEN the man reached the deck, he glanced over the stern of the schooner, and the tide running out, had the bow pointed toward the town.

It was evident that he expected the boats from that direction; but none were visible, and he ran swiftly forward, and glanced ahead.

There he beheld two boats approaching with a long, easy stroke.

"Those cannot be my men, for they come from the town and not from down the coast."

"Ha! I remember that Jenks hinted that the Government would soon take possession of the schooner, and those are evidently men-o'-war's men."

"Curses! Within two hours more the schooner would have been mine, and now I am thwarted on the very threshold of success."

"But I dare not allow the girl to return, or I

am lost. No, she shall go with me, if we both sink together!"

Having come to this bold resolve, he sped aft with the speed of the wind, and darted into the cabin.

Clotilde stood at bay as he entered, and raised her cutlass; but he advanced upon her with his own blade drawn.

"Back, sir!" she cried, sternly.

"Bah! do you oppose me, girl?" and with a skillful movement of his weapon he twisted hers from her grasp, and springing upon her, placed his hand over her mouth.

He was a man of very great strength, and taking a silk scarf from about his neck, he bound it around the mouth of the young girl, so as to prevent any outcry, and in an instant had slipped about her wrists a pair of handcuffs.

"I dislike to take harsh measures, my lady; but I shall make up for any seeming rudeness by my utter devotion, and the fortune I shall give you."

"Come, for if I remain here five minutes longer I shall lose my life, and you will triumph."

He seized her in his arms as he spoke, and sprung on deck.

The splash of the oars of the approaching boats now resounded near at hand, and the daring man knew that he had not a moment to lose.

Clotilde felt herself powerless in his grasp, for her hands were manacled and her mouth securely bound beyond the possibility of outcry.

So she quietly submitted, awed, and wondering what her reckless captor would do with her.

He left her not an instant in doubt, for, seizing a rope, he passed one end of it about the taffrail, and threw the other over into the water.

Then, holding her securely with his left arm, he grasped the rope with his right hand, and lowered himself into the water, just under the stern of the schooner.

The tide, as said, was running out, and the moment he released the rope it bore him swiftly away from the schooner, just as the two boats ran alongside.

"A minute more and I would have been too late; but so far I am safe, and I shall swim to head off my boats," he muttered.

That he was a superb swimmer there was no doubt, for he moved along with his burden without the slightest effort.

Further and further he went from the schooner, upon the deck of which he heard the tramping of the men who had boarded her.

Then he saw the sails glimmer, and soon after the schooner swung around and headed toward the sea.

She will pass near me, but I think we will not be seen; but what can be up, that she goes at once to sea?

"Wonder if some one has betrayed my crew, and reported their intended coming to cut out the schooner?"

For a few minutes he swam on in silence, and then said, as Clotilde, seeing the coming

schooner, made an effort to free herself from his grasp:

"Be quiet, girl, for I stand no nonsense, and you need have no fear of drowning, as I swim like a fish, and you are no weight to me.

"Be still, I say, for if you attract the attention of some quick-eyed lookout on that schooner, I shall hold you beneath the water and thus quiet you."

This threat had the desired effect, for Clotilde remained quiet while her captor swam on with bold, untiring stroke.

At last, as the schooner drew near, he ceased swimming, and sinking low in the water, sustained his own and the girl's head, only above the water, so as to present as small an object as possible to the sight of any one who might be watching on board the craft.

"Lively, lads! get up that extra sail, for we may have that cruiser after us that ran into the harbor to-night," said a voice on the schooner.

"Benedict's voice among a thousand!

"By Heaven! he then is the one that has captured my prize in the schooner, and not Government men, as I thought.

"Well, he has the schooner, and I have his wife, so we both have captured a prize to-night," and the man fairly hissed the words, while Clotilde made a violent effort to cry out and release herself from the grasp that held her, for she too had recognized her husband's voice, and knew that he had successfully cut out the schooner, while she, alas! was in the power of a man she had every reason to dread.

Half a mile from the shore, her hands manacled, her mouth bound so securely she could utter no cry, and depending wholly upon the pluck and strength of her captor for her life, it was no wonder that she almost gave up in despair, and she felt as though she was going to swoon away.

CHAPTER IX.

BENEDICT, THE BUCCANEER.

AFTER parting with his young and beautiful wife, whose deep love for him made her untrue to herself, for she desired to see him win riches at whatever cost, Boyd Benedict returned to his boat, as the reader will remember, by the magnolia grove, in which had been enacted the tragedy in which he had played so desperate a part.

"Getting into his boat he rowed rapidly up to the town, and landed at a large and rambling old inn near the water's edge.

It was half-ruined and very old, but the street side of it was occupied as a wine-shop, with a few rooms over it for lodgers, and an eating-hall, which gained for it the name of inn.

The rear, or sea side, overhung the water with large gable ends, and looked the very picture of desolation and ruin.

And yet in one of these supposed-to-be-deserted wings, a number of men were congregated, smoking, drinking and sleeping.

Upon entering the inn, Benedict had walked to an alcove at the further end, on his way thither calling out in a feeble voice, in keeping with his apparent age:

"A glass o' rum and water, landlord,"

The landlord, a villainous-looking individual, looked up from waiting on several thirsty customers, and said testily:

"All right, old man, as soon as I have time."

But he quickly served those in front of him, and went to the alcove.

"How goes it, cap'n?" he asked, in a whisper.

"All works well with me; but how about the men?"

"Are waiting for you, and if you had delayed long, would be as drunk as lords; but I will unlock the door and you can go right up to the room."

So saying, he left the alcove; and soon after the rear partition slowly opened, and Benedict stepped out into a hallway, where stood the landlord with a lantern.

"Here is a light, and you know the way," he said.

"Yes, and the boats?"

"Are in the cellar basin all ready."

"Good! so we will be off within half an hour, and if I am successful, you shall be a rich man."

"I hope so, and believe I will, Cap'n Benedict, for I have always found you to be a man of your word.

"But I must get back to my tap-room, so good-luck to you!"

"And to you."

The two men grasped hands, and Benedict, taking the lantern, moved along the rickety hallway for a considerable distance, when he came to a pair of stairs.

These he ascended, and following another passage soon halted at the end before a large iron door.

Upon this he rapped five times distinctly.

A low sound, as of voices, came from within and then a silence followed.

Slowly and without any sound the door swung open a little way and a voice said:

"Who comes?"

"Benedict."

"Ay, ay, captain, and we are glad to see you."

A chain was now unfastened, and the door opened, while Benedict's lantern revealed a room, in which the lamps had been quickly put out at his knock.

There were some thirty men present, all of them armed to the teeth, and evidently sailors by their garb and general appearance.

An honest craft would not care to ship such a crew, for they had that in their faces that indicated a desire to scuttle a ship or cut a throat to further their advancement.

"Well, lads, it is time to start, and I am glad to see you all ready," said Benedict, in that free-and-easy way that a good commander often addresses his men, without any fear that they would look upon him as their equal only.

"Ay, ay, sir, all ready," said a chorus of voices, and after a drink all round at their captain's suggestion, they followed him through a trap-door down a ladder.

The lantern showed water beneath the room, and several boats there, with oars, arms and bundles in two of them.

Into these boats the men entered, and then

seizing a rope, Benedict raised a slide in one side of the walled basin and peered out upon the waters.

"All right, lads, for there is nothing in sight," he said, and then a large shutter was thrown open and the boats were drawn out of the basin.

Then the shutter was closed behind them, the men seized their oars, and pulled out into the harbor. It was now an hour after dark, and Benedict felt that Clotilde had had time to carry out her plan, so he pulled straight for the schooner.

He saw a light on board, but was not hailed as he approached.

This was a surprise; but he kept on and soon ran alongside, though half-fearing that Clotilde had failed in her attempt, and expecting a trap.

Springing on board, cutlass in hand, he saw no one to oppose him, and, followed by his men, he ran into the cabin.

Still no one met him. What could it mean?

Stooping, he picked up Clotilde's bonnet.

This proved that she certainly had been there.

But where was she?

"Not a soul on board, sir, from keel to truck," reported one of the men whom he had selected as an officer.

"This is remarkable.

"Clotilde must have led the whole crew to leave, by some excuse, and found it necessary to go with them.

"But I cannot wait for her; I dare not, so up with the anchor, Marsden, get sail set, and we'll go to sea as fast as wind and tide can carry us."

So said Boyd Benedict, and ten minutes after the schooner was in full flight seaward, in as much more time she had passed the bold swimmer and his captive, and within half an hour the other boat's crew, which had been arranged to join the vessel after leaving port, was on board.

Then the reckless commander ordered his men aft, and in his terse, pleasant way, said:

"Lads, I sail in this schooner on a special mission, and, if successful, you shall all reap a golden reward.

"What that mission is you need not know; but I promise you, until it is accomplished, the lockers shall not go empty of gold, for we will make prizes of such vessels as fall in our way, which our necessity demands.

"Now help me with a will, and I will make your fortunes with my own, risking the yard-arm with you, taking hard knocks with you, and, if necessary, going down in our gallant craft."

Three cheers greeted this address, and Benedict the Buccaneer was afloat upon the seas, bound in search of the Gold Island, though the secret of his cruise he carefully kept from his crew.

CHAPTER X.

THE MEETING IN THE MAGNOLIAS.

WHEN the schooner had passed him, the swimmer felt that he must make for the shore.

It was some distance off, and, strong swimmer

that he was, having never met his equal, he felt that it was necessary for him to get rest.

He had brought a life-preserver with him, which, though but a frail affair, greatly aided him in the support of Clotilde, though, without his assistance it would not have kept her from sinking.

Clotilde also was a good swimmer, and though her arms were of little use, manacled as they were, she had no desire to sink, and so aided in keeping up all in her power.

The boldness of the man, wicked as she believed him to be, won her respect, while his superb swimming commanded her admiration.

At length the shore was reached, and the man aided the woman out upon the beach.

It was just where Benedict had landed in the afternoon, when, in his disguise as an old man, he had sought Clotilde in the arbor.

Her home was not far away, and she beheld the light burning in the little sitting-room, where she knew that her mother must be anxiously waiting for her, while perhaps her father had gone over to the different neighbors to find her.

She felt deep regret at the pain she must give them, by her absence, and thought, when they went to her little room, how they would find the letter of farewell she had written them, telling them that she was going away, but only for a time, when she would return to make them happy and comfortable through life.

This letter she had pinned to a cushion in her room, hoping her mother would not find it until the next day.

Now, as she stood in the shadow of the magnolias, looking at the light, a prisoner, in irons and gagged, she was almost broken-hearted, for her plans had gone wrong, her husband had gone to sea without her, and she felt that she was indeed deserted.

"Clotilde, I have brought you here to rest for a while, as before long my boats will pass on their way up the harbor to take the schooner.

"But, as she has escaped me through that accursed husband of yours running off with her, I shall go on up to the town and capture the little cruiser now lying at anchor there, and which I have reason to know has a very small crew on board."

With her mouth bound, as it was still, Clotilde could make no reply, and the man went on:

"I told one of my men to await the coming of the boats here, and then come on ahead in his canoe, and give me the signal, that I might be ready, and when he got my answer to return and let them come on and board the craft.

"But the fellow is not here and has played me false."

"No, captain, I am here," said a deep voice, and a man stepped out from behind a large magnolia.

The pirate started, and thrust his hand into his breast for a knife, but said quickly:

"Ah! it is you, Osmond?"

"I am sorry I doubted you, but you fairly startled me."

"I sought refuge behind the tree, sir, when I saw two persons land, for I did not at first recognize you and did not expect you here."

"No, my coming was unexpected to myself; but the plot did not go as I planned, as Benedict the Buccaneer has stolen the schooner, and we will have to take second choice."

"This is too bad, sir; but I saw the schooner go by, and feared that you had gotten a crew up in the town and deserted me."

"No, Osmond, I never desert friend or foe, as you will find out when you know me better; but I am glad to see that you are all right, and I shall make you my first officer."

"Thank you, Captain Delbanco, and I will appreciate it, sir; but you spoke of capturing another vessel?"

"Yes, an armed yacht, acting as a Gulf Guard, and commanded by a gallant young middy."

"The Sea Owl?"

"Yes, that is her name; but the boats are not in sight?"

"Yes, sir, and must be near at hand, for I had them under my glass before you landed."

"Ah, yes, there they are, and I will go on with them, asking you to remain here and await my return, either by boat or in the cruiser."

"And the prisoner, sir, for so she seems?"

"Yes, that is why I wish you to remain, for I shall leave her with you, and I do not wish her along, as there may be fighting; but guard her well."

"I will do so, sir."

"She must be dangerous, sir, as you have her both manacled and gagged."

"She is a tartar, and a pretty one to boot; but hold no conversation with her, and I make you responsible for her, Osmond."

"I shall be, sir, with my life."

"Now there come the boats, and I will leave you; but keep a bright watch, and when you see the cruiser coming, come out to us in your canoe."

"Yes, Captain Delbanco."

"If Fate goes against me I will come for you in a boat."

With this the man turned away, without a word to Clotilde, and walked down to the shore, where two boats, filled with men, had just landed.

After a moment's delay he sprung into the stern-sheets of one, and the two pulled swiftly away over the dark waters, heading up toward the distant town, while Clotilde and her guard were left alone among the magnolias.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHARGE AND COUNTER-CHARGE.

IN silence the two—the man Osmond, and the young and beautiful prisoner, Clotilde—stood gazing after the receding boats.

The maiden was certainly suffering, and showed it, but she could utter no complaint, bound as was her mouth with the silk scarf.

The wetting chilled her, the iron handcuffs chafed her delicate wrists, and the scarf about her face really hurt her, while she was tired, and her heart was full to bursting.

She gazed fixedly at the face of her companion, or rather guard, and shuddered, as though she knew him and felt dread of him.

"At last, as the boats disappeared from sight, the man turned, and said, quietly:

"You know me?"

The girl nodded.

"Do you believe an oath binding, Clotilde?"

Again a nod.

"Will you swear to me, if I take this bandage from off your lips, you will utter no outcry?"

Another nod was her reply.

He saw that she was trembling, and he placed his coat about her shoulders, and then took from about her face the scarf, saying as he did so:

"You swear that you will utter no cry for help?"

At first her parched lips could give no utterance, but after an effort she answered:

"Yes."

"Remember, you are within three hundred yards of your home, and that tuneful voice of yours might be heard there, should you call out."

"I shall remain quiet," was the low answer.

"You know me, I see?"

"Yes, I know you, Oscar Ormond, as one I hate," was the almost angry answer.

The man laughed lightly, and then said:

"It is strange that you should hate me when I love you so dearly."

"Your love is a sacrilege on the name."

"Well, whatever it is, I love you, ay, as deeply as I have hated your father, who hunted me down for my little misdeeds and made me commit greater ones."

"I tell you, Clotilde, I intended to lead a square life; but your father would not let me."

"My father knew of your wickedness, and it was his duty to punish crime."

"Once he liked you greatly, and even thought of you as a suitor for my hand."

"But, when he knew that you had gambled away your mother's home, taken her money, and thus, by your actions, broken her heart, he felt that you were no man to be the lover of his daughter, and he sentenced you to punishment for your crimes."

"Ay, and put me in a loathsome prison."

"Yes, from which you escaped by killing the keeper, and a reward is now upon your head."

"I care nothing for that, or I would not, two years after my escape, have ventured back here."

"But I have come, and a field opens itself before me to win gold from this night, for life has gone hard with me."

"You have been a pirate, people say."

"Granted, it is no worse than what people say of you."

"Ah! what is said of me?"

"That you ran off and married a pirate, when you could have had the pick of the best young men in the town, yes, and of the aristocrats in the navy too."

"But when your outlaw husband deserted you, you came back here to live with the old people again."

"It is false! my husband did not desert me," said Clotilde savagely.

"Well, they say so; but tell me, how it is that I find you the prisoner of Captain Delbanco?"

"He kidnapped me," was the evasive reply,

"For what purpose?"

"God only knows," was the dejected response.

"Well, I shall guard you safely for him; but, if you will promise to one day be my wife, I shall see that no harm befalls you, and more, I will aid you to escape when the opportunity offers."

"I have as much to fear from you, as I have from the man you call Delbanco."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"Perhaps so, but I love you and hence would do you no harm; but listen, while I tell you that the man you love, the one you call your husband, is the worst enemy you have."

"Never! for he is all love and kindness to me," she said warmly.

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"When did you see him last?"

"This—I mean I shall not tell you."

"Then let me tell you."

"You do not know!"

"Don't I?"

"No."

"Did you not have a visit from an old gentleman this afternoon?"

The girl was silent, but she started at the question.

"Answer me."

"What has that to do with my husband?"

"Do you think I cannot penetrate his disguise?"

"Do you know my husband?"

"Yes."

"I do not believe you."

"I do, for I sailed with him, started a mutiny, and he had me, as he believed, shot, and thrown overboard."

"We were lying in the Mississippi River at the time, and he was captain of a trading schooner, which I intended to capture and turn into a pirate craft."

"But I was only slightly wounded, swam ashore, and swore to be avenged against Boyd Benedict, should he again cross my path."

"I had not met him since until to-day, when I saw him land yonder on the shore and go to the arbor and join you."

"And you say you penetrated his disguise?"

"I knew the old man, as he pretended to be, was none other than an old enemy."

"Where were you?"

"In the magnolias here."

"It is strange you did not then attempt to avenge yourself upon him," sneered the girl.

"I thought of it; but I had had ill-fortune enough, and wanted to make no mistake, especially as I was here under Captain Delbanco's orders, and had hopes to make a big start to-night on the road to fortune."

"And you tell me that my husband is my foe?"

"I do."

"You cannot prove it."

"Would you call the man who killed your father your friend?"

"Oh, no! how could I?"

"Well, Boyd Benedict killed your father this very afternoon."

"It is a lie! yes, in your false teeth I throw the lie, Oscar Osmond!"

The girl drew herself up to her full height, and raised her manacled hands before the man, upon whom she glared with indignant rage, for having been with her husband that very afternoon, and knowing that he was then at sea, she felt that the charge made against Boyd Benedict was false.

The one who made it, however, was unmoved by her words.

He seemed to expect just such an outburst upon her part, and stood gazing upon her, as she faced him in her fury.

After a moment of silence he said:

"You throw the lie into my teeth, my pretty Clotilde, but you will have to eat your words when I give you proof."

"You have no proof."

"I have."

"I defy you."

"Come!"

He took her arm as he spoke and led her further into the magnolia grove.

A few paces, and in an open space they came upon a prostrate form.

Throwing herself by the side of the form, Clotilde bent over and took one glance into the face, which was discernible, from the starlight penetrating through an opening in the trees.

"Yes! oh, yes! it is my father, and, accursed villain! *you are his murderer!*" and Clotilde sprung to her feet and confronted the man who had made the same charge against Boyd Benedict.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CRUISER.

AMONG the American vessels-of-war, that cruised in the Gulf, and adjacent waters, there was no craft more trim, fleetier, or saucy-looking than the Sea Owl.

That little vessel, of sixty tons, had had a most remarkable career; first belonging to a band of smugglers, she had been taken from them by a young yachtsman, a planter on the coast.

Recaptured by smugglers, the Sea Owl had been again retaken by her former captor, to be cut out from her anchorage by pirates, and once more fallen into the hands of the gallant Boy Planter, whose services had gotten him a midddy's commission from the Government.

"Fitting his yacht out fully, with other mid-dies as officers, and a small but effective crew, he had served as a Gulf Guard Gunboat, and had done good service against sea outlaws of all kinds, even against the wreckers that infested the Bahamas.

But love came in and won the young planter midddy from his sea life, and he gave his vessel to his next officer in command, Midshipman Henry Herbert, a youth scarcely less daring and skillful as a commander than himself.

With a courage that was reckless, Middy Herbert had matched his schooner against a pirate of double his size, with twice as many guns and treble his crew, and though beating off the rover, he had been so severely handled that he had to put into port for repairs, and to get more men.

While undergoing repairs he had given his crew leave, all excepting a guard, and, unable to secure more men at Pensacola, he had run short-handed to St. Augustine, arriving there just prior to the scenes that open this story.

It was this trim cruiser, the Sea Owl, that Captain Delbanco determined to seize, when he was disappointed in getting the Flagless Schooner cut out by Boyd Benedict.

The Sea Owl lay at anchor up the harbor, and had but ten men on board, with three officers.

Upon the night in question, Captain Herbert, as the middy commander was called by courtesy, and one of his officers, had gone on shore for a frolic, while four of the crew had been sent to the inns in the hope of picking up some seamen, for there was work to be done at sea for the little vessel.

This left the Sea Owl with but one officer and six men on board; but then, little danger was feared there in port.

The anchorage of the schooner that was cut out was far below that of the Sea Owl, so that her leaving the harbor had not been discovered; and the middy in charge was pacing the deck, smoking a cigarrito, and little dreaming of danger, while his men were forward engaged in spinning yarns.

Suddenly the sound of oars fell upon the ears of the middy, and he glanced in the direction from whence it came.

Then he discovered two boats, one in advance of the other, heading directly for the schooner.

Still he could not suspect danger, for all about him were vessels at anchor, the fort was not far away, and it was a common thing for boats to be going about the harbor.

But as they came steadily on, and drew within hailing distance, he sung out:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Ahoy the Sea Owl!" was the response, in a deep voice.

"What boats are those?"

"Men-o'-war's boats, sir, from the American sloop-o'-war Dolphin, lying at anchor below."

"I bear dispatches, sir, to Middy Herbert."

"Ay, ay! come alongside!" called out the middy, and two minutes after a man sprung to the deck, and without any warning of danger the middy was felled to the deck, while almost as quickly his amazed seamen were seized.

"Bind and gag them, throw them into our boats alongside, and set them adrift!" came the stern order, and it was obeyed with an alacrity which only men accustomed to such work could do.

"Now up with that anchor, and spread canvas upon her."

"The fort may open, if they suspect anything wrong, but we must take our chances," said Captain Delbanco, for he it was.

So quietly had all been accomplished, without a loud word or a shot, that the crews of the merchant vessels lying near suspected no wrong.

They knew that the Sea Owl was expecting to get a crew, and, seeing the boats run alongside, supposed that they contained the men just shipped.

When the Sea Owl got up sail and glided away from her anchorage, they suspected that orders had come for a sudden move, and the drifting boats left in her wake they concluded had been anchored out to await her return.

When, after some time, one of the boats drifted alongside of a brig, and the watch discovered the bound and gagged men in it, the secret came out, and an alarm was given; but the Sea Owl was three leagues away.

Having so cleverly cut the little schooner out, Captain Delbanco ran down opposite the Magnolia Point and laid to, going ashore himself in a boat.

Springing out upon the beach he sought to find Osmond and his fair prisoner.

But they were nowhere to be seen.

Searching the grove he suddenly came upon a prostrate form.

"Ha! there has been deadly work here."

"By Heaven! it is the constable, and dead!"

"What does it mean, and where can Delbanco and the girl be?"

"Well, much as I would like the man for my luff, and the girl for my wife, I dare not linger here."

"But another time I will solve this mystery, and gain my ends."

"Ho, lads! pull hard for the schooner," he cried, as he sprung into his boat, and reaching the vessel, as she once more sped away seaward, he muttered:

"Now to find that Pirates' Island and the treasure it holds, and I am the richest man on earth."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REPENTANT PADRE.

HENRY HERBERT was a dashing, handsome middy of eighteen.

His father had been a naval officer, and the boy had been reared on board a vessel-of-war, and when but twelve, the sailors were wont to call him their Boy Captain, and say that he knew more about a ship from keel to truck than any officer that walked the quarter-deck.

A favorite with the officers, he was the idol of the crew, and was treated with a respect equal to that shown to his father.

In his service with him, Midshipman Brandt, the Planter Commander of the Sea Owl, had found him a most useful *aide* and staunch friend, and had turned the little schooner over to him, with perfect confidence in his ability.

It was therefore with the utmost chagrin that Henry Herbert reached the shore to find the whole harbor a scene of excitement over the cutting out of his vessel.

He had just learned from his few seamen ashore, that they had been successful in finding a number of sailors to serve with him.

In almost dismay the youth stood on the shore, his brother middy and few men about him, listening to the story told by an old tar who had just landed.

"And where is Mr. Rule and the six men?" he asked.

"On board that pretty brig, Sea Cloud, that is setting all old sailors wild with her taut look," answered the man, and then he added:

"There come the boats now."

Just then two boats were seen approaching the shore, and as they landed, out sprung Midshipman Rule and his six fellow-unfortunates.

"Ah, Captain Herbert, I was just going to seek you, but I see you have heard the story."

"Yes—in part. But tell me how it happened."

In a few words the young middy told his commander of the clever capture, adding:

"The pirate chief gave me a blow that stunned me, and when I came to myself I was on board the brig Sea cloud, which is the prettiest craft I ever saw, not excepting the Sea Owl, and I have been trying to negotiate with her captain for her."

"A good idea, Rule, but what is she?"

"A brig of ninety tons only, sharp as a razor, gaunt as a hound amidships, with sticks as tall as steeples, and spars that can spread an acre of canvas."

"A good description, surely; but what trade is she in?"

"A fancy trader, owned by her captain, who has four guns on board and a crew of fifteen men."

"He is a fancy fellow, has rigged his craft up as trim as a ball-room belle, and will sell her for cash, but wants a price enough to buy a line-of-battle-ship."

"Will he not drop in his price?"

"Not he, sir, for he loves gold, and is, as I said, a fancy trader, for I do not believe he would allow anything in his cargo that would soil the deck or hold."

"He says his craft is fleetier than a tornado, and can ride out a hurricane, while he built her for his own use, and will part with her at his own price only."

"And what does he ask for her?"

"A clear thirty thousand."

"Phew! but if our old commander, Midshipman Brandt, was here, we could get her, for he is rich and would have her at any price; but where could we arm her, if we got her?"

"The fort at the monastery above, has a number of fine ship guns, pivots and howitzers," said Midshipman Rule.

"True, for I saw them the other day; but then I am poor, and cannot raise the money, so we can only sail for New Orleans and report our loss and ourselves to the admiral," responded Midshipman Herbert dejectedly.

"My son, let me speak with you a moment."

The voice was low, deep and by no means unpleasant, and the speaker was a padre in the full cloth of his holy calling.

He had joined the little crowd, apparently unseen, and had heard all that had passed.

He now addressed Midshipman Herbert, who crossed himself devoutly, and followed the padre a few paces apart.

"My son, you were the commander of the little schooner which the pirates cut out from her anchorage an hour ago?"

"Yes, father."

"It was a clever capture on their part."

"It certainly was, father."

"You desire to give chase and recapture your vessel?"

"Oh! if I could only do so, sir."

"You can."

"That is impossible, sir, for there is but one vessel that I can get, and she is set at the price of thirty thousand dollars, and I am poor, and the Government commandant here can give me no authority for her purchase."

"I can though."

"You?" and Middy Herbert fairly started with surprise at the words of the padre.

Surely a priest could not be idly making such an assertion, that he could get the brig for him, he thought, and not mean it.

"The brig is for sale, my son, and though the price is large, I will get her for you, while I will also allow you to have the guns in Fort Ramon, which belongs to the monastery of that name," continued the priest.

"But can you do this, father?" asked Middy Herbert incredulously.

"I promise only what I can fulfill, my son."

"It is remarkable, father, that you do this for me."

"I do it for myself, my son, as well as for justice."

"Time was when I was a very wicked man."

"I accumulated riches, and made Ramon villa my home; but I changed my career, and am now a padre, the superior of the Monastery Ramon, and this very night you shall own the brig and place the guns upon her, that you may go in chase of your schooner."

"I am repentant now, my son, for the sins of my past, and I wish to do good in the world."

"Come, I will get in your boat with you and go out to the brig."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SEA CLOUD SETS SAIL.

THE brig Sea Cloud had not been over-rated by Midshipman Rule.

She had glided into the harbor some days before, under easy sail, and won the admiration of even landmen by her beauty of outline.

They had not seen her under sail in a spanking breeze, but if she was not a flyer, then her looks belied her.

Her capstan sockets were brass-mounted, the binnacle was of solid metal, and all the mountings likewise, while all were burnished brightly and shone like gold.

Her decks were as white as snow, her spars slender and exceedingly long, her masts towered high in air, and her bowsprit shot far out over her razor-like bows.

Four broadside guns were her only armament, two to a side, with space for a third and fourth directly amidships and upon the forecastle and stern.

Her crew were neatly attired in white duck pants, blue shirts and red caps, and were a score in number.

But one quarter-deck officer was on board, and he was commander and mate as well.

He was a perfect dandy in attire, young, and with the air of one who was a brave fellow and good seaman in spite of his fancy appearance.

This person sat alone in his cabin at the time the boat came alongside bearing the padre and Middy Herbert.

It was against the brig that the boats had

gold you will never find, and are simply trying to buy me with promises."

"But I will tell you more, to prove my truth."

"There is an Indian Pilot whom I have heard of, that knows just where lies this island, and I know his haunts, so that we will seek him, and have him go with us."

"Where is your vessel?"

"I intend to seize Delbanco's."

"The risk is too great."

"Then we will secure another vessel."

"Where?"

"From the Reef Pirates."

"And your crew?"

"The Reef Pirates will serve as such."

"Ah! thank you for telling me where I can get the aid I needed, and for this purpose I led you on," said Clotilde with a sneer.

"Then you refuse to go with me?"

"I do, and furthermore, I shall inform Captain Delbanco of the traitor he has for his lieutenant."

"Never! for you shall go with me," and the man stepped toward her.

But quick as a flash she drove her manacled hands directly into his face, and the blow felled him to the ground, while, with a cry of joy and with the speed of a deer, she bounded away through the forest.

At first her steps were turned toward her own home; but suddenly she stopped short and stood trembling, as she gazed at the twinkling light in the little cottage.

"No, no! I cannot go there—not there. My lips can never tell my mother that my husband—the one she warned me against, and he who my father said would some day die with a rope about his neck—took the life of the dear old man who lies in yonder woods."

"No, I will go elsewhere; yes, I'll go to the people whom that man told me of—the Reef Pirates."

Slowly she turned away and penetrated deeper into the forest; while Oscar Osmond, half-dazed by the blow he had received, arose to his feet.

Gazing about him he could nowhere see his captive, and he muttered through his shut teeth:

"She has escaped me!"

Then he made a short search, but it was fruitless, and he again said:

"Delbanco will kill me if I tell him she escaped, and if I remain here she will alarm the neighbors, and they will hang me sure."

"I will leave at once; and there is but one course left for me, and that is to go to the haunts of the Reef Pirates and ally myself with them."

So saying, he made his way rapidly to the shore, sprung into the canoe that he had come there in, and which he had hidden in the bushes, and paddled swiftly away down the coast, little dreaming that the girl had formed the same intention to seek the Reef Pirates, and was then walking through the forest by paths which she believed would take her to the desolate place she sought.

And thus through the long hours of the night she held on her way, tired out, suffering physically and mentally, until at dawn she came out

into an opening in which stood a small farmhouse.

Then she knew that she had lost her way, and instead of going further into the depths of the forest, she had come out in the borders of civilization.

But she could go no further, and then across her mind came the thought:

"I left my poor father lying there in the magnolia grove, with no one to know his fate. I will at once seek the dweller in yonder cottage, and send him to town with the tidings."

She hurried on to the cottage, and as a man approached her, hastened to tell her story.

Then she sunk in a swoon at his feet.

CHAPTER XVII.

JUST IN TIME.

WHEN Clotilde arrived at the farmhouse she was in that condition of nervousness and prostration that found relief in unconsciousness.

When she recovered, she found herself in kind hands, for the housewife knew just what to do, and had done it in a motherly way.

They were poor people, but with kindly hearts, and while the farmer had gone off to town, his wife had devoted herself to the stranger.

It was late at night when the good man returned, and as Clotilde was asleep he would not disturb her; but, with the morning he sought her out and said:

"Well, missy, I went to town yesterday."

"And did you tell them that the constable lay dead among the magnolias on the Point below the town?" eagerly asked the young girl.

"No, missy, I didn't tell 'em what they knew."

"Ah! they knew it then?"

"Yes, missy, somebody had found the body, and with it one whom they arrested."

"It was Oscar Osmond, and I suppose they believe him to be the murderer."

"Oh! what a chance is this to avenge myself upon him."

The last words were now said aloud.

"Yes, missy, there were some young hunters that found the body, just at dawn, and near it stood the one they arrested."

"He started to walk away, but they halted him with their guns, and then he showed fight, and they shot him."

"Had they killed him?"

"No, missy, but they wounded him, and run on him; but he killed one o' them before he was captured."

"Then they tied him and took him off to town and threw him into prison, and it was well for him they did, as the townspeople wanted to string him up."

"Did he not say that he was innocent of the murder?"

"Yes, missy, but he was caught near the body and that settled it."

"And my mother?"

"She was taking on fearful about the death o' your father, missy, and because folks said as how you had been kidnapped."

"But, as I saw that they had found the body, and your mother was so distressed I concluded

to use my own judgment and say nothing about what you told me, but to come back and let you know how matters stood."

"I am glad that you did so, for now I can remain in hiding for awhile; but do you think that they will hang Oscar Osmond?"

"Who is he, missy?"

"The man they arrested near my poor father's body, and suspect of being his murderer!"

"They'll hang the Injun, missy; but that you called him was not his name."

"The Indian?" asked Clotilde, in surprise.

"Yes, missy. It was an Injun they found there."

"Indeed! I thought it was that man Osmond."

"No, missy; it was an Indian chief they call Pasquagoula."

"His tribe was once a great one, but there are but few left, and his village was massacred some years ago by the Reef Pirates, I believe, and he has been on the war-path after them ever since."

"Folks say he has kilt many a one since, and I guess he has, for he has a canoe with sails, that he cruises about in along the shores, and they tell how no man knows the waters better than what he does."

"I have heard of the Indian, and I am sorry that they suspect him of being my father's murderer."

"And he'll hang for it, too, missy; but then he's only an Injun."

"He shall not die for a crime of which he is not guilty."

"How far is it from here to town?" asked Clotilde, quickly.

"By road, ten miles, missy; then you can go to the bayou and take a skiff, and in half an hour be in the Gulf, and it is then but two leagues along the shore."

"Have you a skiff you can let me have?"

"I will take you there, missy."

"Thank you, sir, and we will start at once, for I must not remain away when another's life is in danger for a crime he did not commit."

The farmer seemed to feel that this was the best course for Clotilde to pursue, as did also his wife.

They both considered that there was some deep mystery in the death of the constable, the flight of the maiden, and there being another man mixed up in the affair.

Kind hearted though they were, they did not wish to be drawn into the mysterious affair, and were greatly relieved when Clotilde spoke of going, for it would not make it necessary for them to make known what she had told them.

The skiff was soon ready, a kindly farewell was spoken, and the farmer headed down the bayou, rowing a strong stroke, while the maiden sat at the tiller.

A row of little over a mile and the open water was reached, and sail was set.

Away sped the little skiff under a brisk breeze, and late in the afternoon they landed near the cottage of the dead constable.

Gathered there Clotilde saw a large number of people, and they were moving toward Mag-

nolia Point, evidently under some great excitement.

"Good-by, missy," cried the farmer, as Clotilde sprung on shore and darted up the hill.

But she did not hear him, or bearing, did not heed, and suddenly confronted the excited crowd.

They were all men whom she knew, and who knew her, and they started back as she suddenly appeared in their midst.

Her hands were still manacled, for the farmer had been unable to remove the irons, and her face was white as though life had left her.

Her clothes had been dried by the good farmer's wife, but were wrinkled, torn and soiled, while her long hair hung unconfined down her back.

With her manacled hands stretched forth toward the crowd, she cried sternly:

"What means this excitement before the house of the dead, and what are you going to do with that poor man?"

The one she referred to was a tall, superbly-formed Indian of perhaps forty-five.

His face was bold, resolute, clear-cut and fearless, and his eyes flashed back defiance at those about him.

His left arm hung bleeding by his side, and there was a gash upon his forehead, evidently made by a blow from a pistol-barrel.

He was clad in buckskin leggins, his body was bare, and he wore a coronet of feathers upon his head, while upon his broad breast was painted an anchor in red.

About him were a rough set of the townspeople, the very ones who had had most cause to fear the dead constable whose death they now sought to avenge.

About the Indian's neck was a rope, and the crowd had hold of it, leading him toward the magnolias.

At the sight of Clotilde the crowd fell back, and in answer to her stern words, one said:

"Miss Clotilde, this man murdered your father; but in the name o' Neptune, what has happened to you?"

"That man did not murder my father, so release him at once," was the response.

"He was found by the constable's body, miss, over in the magnolias, and he resisted arrest and killed Hank Green."

"He was innocent and did right to resist."

"Innocent?" cried the crowd in chorus.

"Yes, the man who killed my poor father cut out the Flagless Schooner last night from her anchorage and is now far at sea, but not beyond my revenge, for I shall hunt him down."

"I was with my father when he died, and would have been also at sea, a prisoner to a pirate, had I not made my escape and wandered all night in the forest."

"That Indian has done no wrong, and I shall set him free."

As she spoke she advanced and took the rope from about his neck, and the Indian was free.

But she saw that he suffered greatly, and said in a kindly tone:

"Come, Pasquagoula, come into my cottage and I will see that you have a bed to lie on and that your wounds are cared for."

"No, let Pasquagoula go to the woods. He

drifted with their bound prisoners, and the young midddy and men and had been taken on board and kindly cared for.

The boat was promptly hailed, and then permitted to come alongside, the padre and the midddy boarding, and after a short delay being admitted to the cabin.

The captain arose politely as his guests entered, and bade them be seated, while he called to a negro servant to set forth wine and refreshments, saying pleasantly:

"This is an honor, father, which my brig has not before had—a visit from a priest, and I trust your coming will bring good luck to the Sea Cloud."

"I hope so, my son, and pray so; but we have disturbed you by a visit at this late hour, on account of an unfortunate occurrence in our harbor this evening, of which you know."

"Yes, sir, the cutting out of the Government cruiser Sea Owl."

"To that I refer, and I would be glad to have your vessel start in chase."

"My brig, father, is but a merchant craft."

"She is my personal property, and I cruise in her from port to port, picking up odds and ends here and there, and trading in them."

"The Sea Cloud has teeth to bite only when attacked; but she depends upon her speed, and is no sea bulldog."

"Yet she is for sale?"

"Not exactly; but, as I said to an officer to-night, I will sell her if I get my price."

"And that is how much?"

"Thirty thousand dollars in gold right down."

"I will take the brig at that sum, captain," quietly said the padre.

The seaman looked surprised, but asked:

"When do you wish her, father?"

"At once."

"And the money?"

"Shall be paid as soon as I go to the Monastery Ramon."

"The brig is yours, padre."

"No, she is bought as a Government vessel for this young officer, and he will sail in her at once, and I wish the papers of sale made out to him."

"As you please, sir."

"Now, my son," and the padre turned to Middy Herbert, "go ashore and get your men, and I will see if I cannot get the captain here to persuade his crew to accompany you, and then you will have force enough, and he will also send me to the monastery and bring me back, will you not, sir?"

"With pleasure, father," was the smiling response.

Henry Herbert could find no words to thank the padre; and hastily departed to collect a crew, leaving the holy man on board the Sea Cloud.

When he had left the cabin, the captain of the brig said quickly:

"Is not this a sudden change of plan, senor?"

"Yes."

"I do not exactly understand it, to be deprived of my command, after I have spent months in having this vessel built for you."

"I will tell you, that circumstances have oc-

curred to wholly change my life, and which forced me to become what you now see me.

"My elegant home I have turned into a monastery, and I have put on the gown of a padre, intending to so remain."

"I sent you to Baltimore to have this vessel built, expecting to use her and make you her captain; but I shall give you the money to buy or build another, to carry out my plans, if occasion arises for so doing."

"Are you satisfied?"

"Wholly so, senor."

"Then give the brig into the hands of the midshipman upon his return, and order your crew to go with him."

"To-morrow come to me and get your money and go your way until I need you."

"Should I never call upon you, it will be because I have determined to remain as I am, and you will have been well paid."

"I am content, Senor Padre."

"And I," and the padre left the brig, having given orders that she should be hauled alongside of the monastery fort, and take what guns her young commander needed.

Soon after Middy Herbert returned with two-score good men, and with those belonging to the brig, felt that he was well equipped.

The padre he did not see, but the captain of the brig had hauled the craft alongside the fort, and his men were getting the guns on board.

But he relinquished his command to the midddy, and went ashore, and so rapidly did the new crew work, that before dawn the Sea Cloud was flying seaward like an arrow in chase of the captured Sea Owl.

CHAPTER XV.

THE VOW IN THE MAGNOLIAS.

I WILL now return to the time when Clotilde beheld the form of her father, lying among the magnolias.

In her frenzied grief she had turned upon Oscar Osmond, accusing him of being the murderer, and although he was innocent of the charge, he cowered beneath the accusation, for he saw that the girl was wild with fury.

Hers was a gentle nature, until aroused, and then a tigress was not more fierce, an Indian more revengeful.

As the two stood there, the man shrinking back, the girl leaning forward, her manacled hands pointed toward him, and her father lying at her feet, the scene was a thrilling one, and tragic in the extreme.

Though night, the stars shone brightly, and just there was an opening in the trees, through which the light penetrated.

But suddenly came a sound which caused the two thus standing to start.

It was a low moan, and then the sound of a name, spoken in a husky voice:

"Clotilde!"

"Father! thank God you are not dead," and the girl threw herself upon her knees by the side of her parent.

An instant of silence, and then came in almost a whisper:

"Not dead, my child, but dying."

"No! no! father."

"Yes, Clo', I will last for only a few moments more."

"It is strange that I have lived thus long; but I have been powerless to move, and have felt the life slipping from me, and feared that you would not know the secret of my death."

"I know it now, father, and that man shall hang for this act."

"Do you hear, Oscar Osmond? I say you shall hang for this murder!" she cried, excitedly.

"Speak, old man, and say that I am not guilty of this deed," cried Oscar Osmond, coming forward.

But the dying man's hands rested upon the manacles upon his daughter's wrists, and he felt that her clothing was all wet.

"What is this, Clo'? You in irons?"

"Great God! what does it mean?"

Could she tell him, dying as he was, that she had determined to deceive him, and fly from him with her pirate husband?

No, she would not, could not do that, so she said in a low tone:

"Never mind me, father."

"Yes, tell me what these irons mean!" he said, almost sternly.

"Well, sir, I was kidnapped by Delbanco, whom you had in your employ, and he left this man to guard me, while he is trying to cut out the little cruiser up the harbor and turn her into a pirate."

"Oh God! this must not be! quick, child, fly to the town and inform the officials—go, do not mind me," and the dying man tried to rise, but fell back exhausted.

"Father, I will not leave you."

"No, you cannot go, for you are my prisoner," calmly said Oscar Osmond.

"Your prisoner! Never! for I will die here by my father's side first."

"No! no! I will not die, but live to avenge you, my poor murdered father, and I swear to you, by all that is holy that I shall have your murderer, Oscar Osmond there, hang in atonement for your death."

The dying man started, and said in tones that were hardly audible:

"Child! Clotilde! you are wrong, for Osmond is not my murderer."

"He is not? Then in God's name who is, for he shall die, be he whom he may?" and Clotilde spoke with a vehemence that was appalling.

"Who is the murderer?" she cried again, bending over her father.

"Boyd Benedict," was the low answer.

"Hal! hal! hal! now you have your words back in your teeth, Clotilde, when you know that I spoke the truth," said Oscar Osmond exultantly.

"Father, do you mean it?"

"Is Boyd Benedict your murderer?" hoarsely asked the girl.

"Yes."

"My husband?"

"Yes."

"The man whom I trusted, loved to idolatry?"

"Yes, he drove his knife into my bosom."

"When?"

"This afternoon when I met him here, and

he was going to see you, for I had his letter to you."

"And, his hand stained with your blood, your life upon his conscience, he came to me."

"Oh! but he shall die for this, husband though he be of mine," and she raised her manacled hands and continued:

"Hear my words, oh Heaven!"

A moment after she turned to her father once more.

But the constable was dead, and Boyd Benedict had his life upon his hands.

CHAPTER XVI.

PASQUAGOULA.

"YOUR father is dead, Clotilde."

Oscar Osmond saw that the spark of life had at last flitted away, and so addressed the young girl.

"Silence, sir! leave me alone with my dead, without the sound of your voice to make my grief greater!"

"You forget that I have a charge to hold, and cannot leave you."

"But do you mean that you will seek revenge against Boyd Benedict?"

"I do."

"But you love him?"

"I did; but my atom of love has turned to hatred now."

"But he is afloat now in a fleet craft, and with a gallant crew at his command."

"I will hunt him down."

"You are only a girl."

"But have a woman's hate and a man's courage."

"Clotilde?"

"Well."

"Suppose I tell you that I will aid you to find Boyd Benedict?"

"Well, sir?"

"If I show you the way, if I run him to earth for you, will you be my wife?"

She turned upon him like a fury, and seemed about to give vent to a burst of passionate words; but checking herself she said, calmly:

"Are you a man to insult me over the dead body of my murdered father?"

"You are severe, and I seek to be just."

"I love you, and will devote my life to you."

"Listen, while I tell you that I have joined Captain Delbanco for a purpose."

"That purpose was that I might seize his vessel, as soon as I had won the men to my cause, and in it go in search of a certain island."

"That island, it is said, a vast treasure is buried on, that were the fruits of the pirate Morgan's piracies long ago."

"Somehow the rumor has gone abroad about this Treasure Island, and there will be many searchers for it, for I do not believe any one knows exactly where it is."

"I know, however, that it lies in the Bahamas and is diamond-shaped, and I feel confident I can find it."

"With you I will share the treasure, when I find it, and we will hunt down Boyd Benedict, for I owe him a grudge, too, and would gladly see him hang to the yard-arm."

"What say you now, Clotilde?"

"That you go on a chimerical voyage, after

thank pale-face maiden heap much, but will go."

"No, you are in no condition to go, so come," and she led the way to the cottage, the crowd falling away before her, and the Indian slowly followed.

"Your mother lies very ill, Clo'; but it will be a joy to her to know that you have come," said a woman, meeting her.

"I shall devote my life to her; but first let a blacksmith be sent for to rid me of these irons; and, Mrs. Dunning, please look after this poor Indian, who has been falsely accused, and have Doctor Newell dress his wounds."

"I will, child; but you go to your room and I will follow you."

"Leave the Indian to me," and the good woman took Pasquagoula to his quarters, conducted the doctor from the bedside of the sick woman to see him, and then sent for a smith to cut off the manacles from the wrists of poor Clotilde, who was pacing her little room the very picture of grief.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE INDIAN FRIEND.

SEVERAL weeks passed away, after the scene related in the last chapter.

The schooner, under Boyd the Buccaneer had been several times heard of, from in-coming vessels which it had run down and robbed upon the high seas, and the captured cruiser, Sea Owl, had also been reported engaged in the same work.

The brig Sea Cloud, which had gone in chase, under her boy commander, Midshipman Henry Herbert, had returned to port once, unsuccessful in her search, but after getting on board the necessary stores, she had again gone to sea to hunt down the stolen cruiser.

There had been great excitement in the town, over the death of the constable, and "Captain" Jonathan Jenks, who had taken his chief's place, was in a great quandary to solve the mysteries that were hovering over the murder in the magnolias.

He had been certainly sent on a wild-goose chase by Clotilde, the evening he left the schooner; but as the constable was dead, he could not find out whether the maiden was in the plot, or not, to seize the craft; but he had a suspicion that way, and attempted to question her upon the subject.

His attempt was a decided failure, however, and he made up his mind not to try again.

All felt that Clotilde knew more regarding her father's death than she would admit, and looked to Jonathan Jenks to find it out, and he looked wise and pretended to be fully posted, and promised, in the proper time to give the secret to the public.

He did not care to anger Clotilde, for he hoped some day to hang her husband, and by thus making a widow of her, to make her his wife.

The constable had left a snug little property, with a pile of money laid away, and Clotilde would of course inherit it.

Her mother had lingered between life and death for weeks, and then death had been the victor.

She had been laid in the little churchyard, by the side of her husband, and Clotilde had returned to her desolate home.

Pale, wan and desolate she looked; but she refused to be comforted, and insisted upon remaining alone in her little home.

The Indian chief, Pasquagoula, had received devoted attentions at her hands, and, skillfully cared for by the doctor, he had rapidly recovered from his wounds, and one night, before the death of Clotilde's mother, he had silently stolen away, leaving no word of thanks and no clue as to his whereabouts.

Oscar Osmond Clotilde had not heard from since that fearful night in the magnolias, and what had become of him she could only guess, and she concluded that he had joined Captain Delbanco upon his return and gone to sea with him.

She did not doubt but that, in such a case, he would keep his resolve to seize the schooner from her commander, and go upon the search for the Gold Island.

Also, if he once got command of the craft, she felt assured that he would run in some night with the intention of capturing her, and this she determined to prevent.

Her husband, she knew, had turned pirate, although he might be searching for the Gold Island also, and she feared that he, too, might pay her a visit.

Though she was most anxious to meet him, and accuse him of murdering her father, at the same time seeking revenge upon him, she did not wish to meet him when he would hold the advantage.

Of course she knew not the circumstances of the meeting between her father and her husband; but the fact stood that the latter had killed the former, and she had it from dying lips, so could not doubt it.

There was no palliation of the crime given by her father, and thus she accepted the deed in all its enormity.

Delbanco she also felt that she had cause to fear, if he was not dethroned by Oscar Osmond, and with these dreaded dangers before her, Clotilde made up her mind that that little home would be no safe place for her.

"No, no, I must depart from here and go in the tracks of these men who would be on mine, if they knew I was in their power."

She left the little home as she spoke, and wended her way to the little churchyard, where rested her parents, both murdered, she felt, by the act of Boyd the Buccaneer, for her mother had died of a broken heart she well knew.

It was a quiet spot, with only the church-bell to awaken its echoes, when calling the people to prayer, or an occasional funeral filing in by day to disturb its solitude.

No one was in the little village of the dead when she arrived, and she crossed the green sward to the newly-made graves of her father and mother.

She had brought fresh flowers with her, and these she placed upon the mounds with tender hand.

"Alas! alas! I am all alone now, and with no friend in the world," she said, in quivering accents, as she knelt by the side of the graves.

"No, Pasquagoula friend of pale-face maiden."

The words fell upon her ear so unexpectedly that she started to her feet in momentary alarm, as though about to fly from the spot.

But she checked the impulse as she turned and beheld the Indian chief standing before her, and who repeated in his deep tones:

"Pasquagoula friend of pale-face girl now."

CHAPTER XIX.

PASQUAGOUA'S STORY.

IF Clotilde had wondered at the strange conduct of the Indian chief, in leaving her home without a word of thanks, or even seeing her, after all her kindness to him, his coming to her there, in her moment of deep distress, and when she most needed a friend, was proof positive that he had not forgotten her, or been unappreciative of what she had done for him.

"You say you are my friend, Pasquagoula, and I thank you, for I am sadly in need of friendship now, when I am all alone in the world," she said, rising from the graves and extending her hand to the red-skin.

He passed quickly around to the opposite side, and then grasped her hand across the graves, while he said in his deep tones:

"Red-skin offer hand of friend over grave to pale-face maiden, it mean he be true friend forever."

"I believe you, Pasquagoula; but tell me, where have you been since you left the cottage?"

"Been after big canoe; want pale-face maiden go with me."

"Where?"

The Indian was silent a moment, and then he said:

"What name of pale-face maiden?"

"Clotilde."

"No good name for Indian; Pasquagoula call her Tear Eye."

"Tear Eye? Alas! it is strangely appropriate now, for my eyes are full of tears that well up from my heart continually."

"But they must leave now, for I have work to do."

"What work for Tear Eye?"

"Do you see that grave?" and she pointed to her father's.

"Yes, see him."

"Well, my father who lies there was killed by a man whom I intend to track to his death!"

"Who he?"

"He was my husband, and in killing my father he turned my love to hatred, and his acts placed my poor mother in her grave, too."

"Heap bad; but, where bad pale-face now?"

"At sea."

"Sailor chief?"

"Yes."

"Pasquagoula sail wing-boat, too."

"I have heard that you were a splendid sailor, and knew all the waters and islands of the Gulf."

"Know heap."

"Where do you live?"

"On land, big water, anywhere, everywhere," was the sorrowful response.

"You are homeless, then, as I am?"

"Yes; but Pasquagoula have home one time, and was young chief; but bad pale-face come and kill his people, burn his village, and leave him alone like Tear Eye."

"But Pasquagoula take trail of bad pale-face and make it red, on land and big water, too. He go here, there, all where and kill his foe."

"One time he nearly got kill, but good young brave come to help him and save his life."

"Then he go with young pale-face chief of wing-boat to pay him for what he did for Pasquagoula; but wing-boat land at island where bad pale-face live and have bright light to kill wing-boat on rocks, and Pasquagoula got made prisoner."

"Bad pale-face escape and take Pasquagoula, and tell him he know secret where Gold Island is, and must show them, or they kill him."

"Pasquagoula no 'fraid to die; but bad pale-face had kill his people, and he want revenge, so tell them he take wing-boat to Gold Island."

"Pasquagoula no fool, so don't take wing-boat to Gold Island, but run on rock, and escape himself, for he swim like fish."

"He swim from island to island until he come to small wing-canoe he leave there long time before. He take this and come back here."

"And what became of the crew you wrecked?"

"All die," was the laconic response.

Clotilde shuddered, but asked:

"And the young pale-face chief of the wing-boat?"

"He came here, Pasquagoula hear, find his sister, and go 'way where Pasquagoula no find him."

"Ah! you refer to the young Senor Bonodel, I guess?"

"Yes, that name."

"He found his sister, who had been stolen in early childhood, the captive of wreckers, and rescued her."

"Tear Eye speak straight."

"Then he came here, gave his vessel, which was known as the Flagless Schooner, to the Government, and departed to live elsewhere with his sister."

"Tear Eye know."

"Yes, and it was that very vessel which my husband, the man who killed my father, stole and ran off to sea in."

"Yes; but don't Tear Eye know where young chief?"

"No, nor any one else, for he wished to live where no one knew him, he told my father."

"Pasquagoula sorry, but will tell Tear Eye secret."

"What is it?"

"Will tell Tear Eye where can find plenty gold; make her rich, so rich."

"Ah! if you would only help me to find Boyd Benedict, the slayer of my parents, for I care not for riches now," sadly said the girl.

"Help her do that."

"But can you?" eagerly asked the girl.

"Know big water heap good; know land and island too."

"But how can we go?"

"Get big boat."

"It will need seamen."

"Got plenty."

"Where?"

"Reef Pirates go."

"Ah! I had forgotten them; but I will need a vessel."

"Get wing-boat, too—buy 'um."

"Ah, yes, I will sell my little home, and devote the money to my purpose."

"No! Tear Eye don't sell home, but keep for when hair grow like snow."

"But I *must* sell it to get the money to buy a vessel and ship a crew."

"Did not Pasquagoula say he Tear Eye friend?"

"Yes, and I believe you."

"Pasquagoula have beads."

"Beads will not bring gold, alas!"

"Yes, heap good beads," and the Indian took from some secret pocket a small buckskin bag.

"Hold hand."

The girl did as he directed, and he poured the contents of the bag into her hand.

She uttered a cry of amazement, for they were not beads, but *diamonds, rubies and emeralds*.

CHAPTER XX.

THE REEF PIRATES.

A STRANGE scene broke upon the eyes of two persons, as they glided up the dark waters of a lagoon, penetrating into the Everglades of Florida.

Moss hung upon all sides, trailing from tree-tops to earth and water, alligators disported lazily in the lagoon, birds with gorgeous plumage flew hither and thither, and a darkness like unto twilight, although it was noonday, was upon the face of nature, so dense was the foliage in that dread retreat.

Suddenly a camp burst into view.

It was situated upon a slight rise of ground upon the right bank of the bayou, and about it was a network wall of poles, to keep back the monsters of the Everglades."

A score of rude huts faced the stream, bowers made of foliage were along the banks, affording retreats for a *siesta*, and behind an earth-work were half a dozen heavy guns, commanding the lagoon, or bayou, for half a mile below the camp.

Just above the camp, a rude village, the bayou widened into a bay several acres in size, and here were anchored a dozen or more vessels.

One of these was a large ship, her masts cut off, so as to allow her passage up the bayou, for in many places the tall trees arched over it, and were connected by masses of gray moss.

The ship, or hull, was anchored fore and aft across the stream and just at the entrance to the little bay, and from her broadside appeared half a dozen small guns, twelves and sixes in size.

Beyond the floating battery were at anchor a brig, several schooners, half a dozen sloops, and two or more fishing-smacks, with small sail-boats.

Two of the schooners and one of the sloops were armed with pivot-guns, mounted fore and aft, as though simply for the purpose of overhauling a prize or firing upon an enemy in pursuit.

The rest of the vessels were unarmed, and were evidently prizes.

On board the floating battery—the large ship's hull—were visible a score of men, gambling, smoking or asleep, as their mood suited them, and from one to three persons were visible upon each of the other crafts.

For the camp, or village, could be seen fully a hundred people, half of whom were women and children.

It was a strange, wild scene, there in the Everglades, and it was the haunt of the Reef Pirates.

So far their retreat had baffled the ingenuity of all cruisers to find, and yet they were prepared to beat off a foe following them into their den, and with doubtless every chance of success, for no large vessels could get up the bayou, even with the topmast off, no landing could be effected on either side, and the little fort and floating battery effectually guarded the approach.

So safe did they feel that the Reef Pirates only kept a lookout boat at the entrance to the bayou, a league below, and from it, upon the approach of danger, a canoe could be sent up to warn the village.

This guard-boat was wont to cruise about in easy reach of the bayou, or lie hidden in some snug retreat along the shore.

But the canoe, which contained the two persons before referred to, had eluded the guard-boat, and boldly penetrated to the very village of the Reef Pirates.

It was a long canoe, with considerable beam, evidently intended for a sea-boat, and carrying two single-stick masts and a bowsprit which could be shipped readily in a moment's time.

Her sails were of light material, and her masts were not very tall, but her booms and gaffs were long, giving considerable spread of canvas between her sticks, which were set far apart.

One person could readily manage the canoe, set and take in her rig, and also urge it forward, when stripped, with a paddle.

It was decked over, excepting aft, where was a narrow cockpit, with a seat upon either side, to serve as a bunk, and this could also be covered by a stout canvas, which would prevent the little craft from filling when snipping heavy waves.

The canoe was now stripped of her sticks and canvas, and was urged forward swiftly by a double paddle, held in the hands of a man seated amidships.

The other person sat aft and held the tiller.

The former was an Indian, the latter a young girl.

In the two the reader cannot fail to recognize Pasquagoula, the Indian Pilot, and Clotilde, the beautiful young wife of Boyd the Buccaneer.

It was a week after their meeting in the little graveyard, and their destination was the haunt of the Reef Pirates which lay before them.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COMPACT.

THE Reef Pirates did not discover the approach of the canoe, until it was almost at the landing.

Then a wild cry of alarm went up.

But a glance showed that there were not a string of men-of-war's boats behind it, and it held but two occupants, and one of these a woman.

The Indian, many of the pirates knew, and also feared, for he had been their foe, and had been one they sought.

Now he had come voluntarily into their power!

Holding in her hand a white flag, showing that she wished peace, Clotilde waved it, as the canoe reached the beach, and then sprung on shore.

Hastening down to the landing were men, women and children, wild-looking and fierce-featured.

Then, from the floating battery and other vessels of the fleet, anchored in the little bay, were coming boats crowded with men and all armed.

It was a dread moment for Clotilde; and especially for the Indian; but she was pale, yet calm, and the red-skin seemed wholly unmoved by the commotion they had caused.

Looking over the faces as she sprung ashore, Clotilde turned pleasantly and said:

"I have come to see your chief, and for your good as well as my own.

"This Indian is my friend, and has been my pilot here."

"Yes, we know him; he has been here before, as there is graves over yonder on the hill to prove," said a man gruffly.

"Well, he comes now, as I do, to be your friend. Where is your chief?"

Just then a man came through the crowd and confronted the maiden, the pirates falling back to allow him to pass.

"I heard you ask for the chief. He stands before you, lady."

"He spoke in a well modulated voice, was of commanding appearance, though he had the face of one who would stop at no crime for his own advancement.

He had evidently been reared among refined people, but his evil nature had brought him down to herd with the lowest of the low.

He was dressed in a fancy sea garb, wore a gold-hilted sword and pistols.

"Are you he whom men call the Pirate Commodore, sir?" asked Clotilde quietly.

"I am Conrad the Pirate, Clotilde, and am glad that you have come to seek your uncle's protection, now that your father, my sister's lamented husband is dead."

"You my uncle?" cried Clotilde, starting back.

"Oh, yes, did you not know the fact?"

"No, and I cannot believe it."

"You shall have proof, then; but, why are you here, may I ask, if not to seek your uncle's protection, now that you are an orphan, for I heard of your sad bereavement?"

"I am here to seek your aid, sir; but do you mean that you are indeed my uncle?" asked the mystified girl.

"Your mother was Sophy Conrad, was she not?"

"Yes."

"You have doubtless heard her speak of her wild brother, Will?"

"Yes, he ran off and went to sea, and I heard had been hanged as a pirate."

"It was not so, for he stands before you; but I would have been had not your father recognized who I was, and allowed me to escape, and I have never forgotten him for it.

"But come, here you are welcome, Clotilde. But, why have you with you one of the worst foes of my band?"

"He is my friend, and comes as such, and he it was who suggested that I should come to you."

"And why have you come, Clotilde?"

"To seek your aid."

"You shall have it."

"I will pay handsomely for the service of yourself and the men I need."

"My services have already been paid for, in all that I do for you, as I told you that I owe my life to your father."

"Still you are not averse to accepting gold where you can readily earn it?"

"Not at all, for I live to get gold, and we live in daily danger of death that we may make our fortunes; but, what is it that you would have me do?"

"Have you a good vessel?"

"Come to my quarters, and we will talk in private."

"The Indian must go with me."

"As you please; but he must be careful, or some of my men may kill him."

"Can you not control them?"

"Yes."

"Then do so, or you will live and die a Reef Pirate, when I have it in my power, through that Indian, to make you as rich as a king."

"Whew! I have heard that the red-skin is the only man alive who knows of a secret that will bring untold wealth."

"And he is my friend, so protect him."

"I will," and turning to the crowd, Conrad, the Pirate Commodore, called out in a loud voice:

"Hear all! this young lady shall be as a daughter to me, and she has come to seek our aid, so is our guest.

"The Indian is her friend, and also our guest, and with my own hand will I kill the man, woman or child who does him harm!"

Then he called to Clotilde and the Indian to follow, and led the way to his quarters, remarking quietly:

"Now, my child, there is a compact between us, and I will not be the one to break it."

CHAPTER XXII.

ALLIED WITH OUTLAWS.

THE "quarters" of the Pirate Commodore, as he called his abiding-place when ashore, consisted of a large cabin with two rooms.

It was raised some feet above the ground, had ship's furniture, and a hammock for a bed.

It was by no means uncomfortable, and about it was an air of rude luxury.

"There, Clo', that shall be your room, for I only use it for my valuable booty, and the red-skin shall have a hammock swung in here with me.

"I was about to eat dinner when you came,

which my cook has ready for me, so we will just dispose of that, and then talk business."

He led the way out beneath a thatched roof, where was spread a table for dinner, and the service upon it was very little like camp life, for it consisted of the finest china and silver.

A negro had cooked a tempting meal of fish, venison, bread, potatoes and coffee, and a flagon of wine, with silver goblets stood near.

"Be seated, Clo', and you also, Pasquagoula.

"Come, you black sea-horse, hurry up and set extra plates here," and Conrad turned to the negro, who grinned all over his face and obeyed, while he muttered:

"Massa, pretty cettle lady, an' red Injun nigger all eat tergedder—he! he! he!"

The meal was discussed with a relish by Clotilde, and eaten by the Indian with a gusto as though he thought he was revenging himself upon his enemies by devouring their food.

After dinner the three sat down for a talk, while the Sea Horse, as his master called the negro, finished up the repast, wine and all, and like a satiated alligator, lay down to sleep through the warm hours of the afternoon.

"Have you a good vessel?" again asked Clotilde, when they sat down in the cool shade for a talk.

"I have several good craft for my work, which is close in-shore, as you may know."

"I wish a craft for deep-sea work."

"I am sorry I cannot oblige you with one."

"We must get one, then."

"Yes, if the work is worth it."

"It is."

"I have a man here, I think can secure us a craft; but he is a new fellow, only came to us a few weeks ago, and I am not sure I can trust him."

"He has lately come from San Augustine, he tells me, and had arranged to cut out a craft for Captain Delbanco, but was deserted by him."

"What is this man's name?" asked Clotilde, quickly.

"Oscar Osmond."

"I half-believed it; and he is in your camp?"

"He is at the mouth of the bayou on the guard-boat, on duty: but that reminds me, how did you get in unchallenged?"

"I came in very easily, for Pasquagoula knew how."

"Ab, yes, I forgot that the Indian was with you, for he can go anywhere a snake can, I verily believe; but do you know this Osmond?"

"You shall know," and Clotilde told all she knew of the man.

Conrad listened attentively, a cruel smile playing about his lips the while, and when she had finished her story he said:

"So he wished revenge upon you, because you would not return his love, and intended to force you to become his wife, after he had kindly made a widow of you?"

"Well, he deserves death for this; but he also intended to prove traitor to the man, Captain Delbanco, who trusted him, and who was making him his first officer, and for this treachery he deserves another death."

"Unfortunately, he can die but once in punishment; but that one death he shall suffer before the rising of another sun."

"What do you mean?" asked Clotilde, nervously.

"Oh! simply, that I will prevent his proving a traitor to me and getting us all hanged," and calling to one of his officers, he ordered him to go with a boat's crew to the mouth of the bayou and bring back the new man, Oscar Osmond, a prisoner, adding:

"If he resists, bring him back dead."

After the boat had departed, Conrad said.

"Now, Clotilde, we must decide upon some plan to get a craft; but can you tell me the nature of the service you wish done?"

"Yes, it is to hunt down the murderer of my poor father."

"A work I will gladly aid you in."

"You know who he is?"

"No."

"My husband."

"Ah! I heard that you had run off and married a wild, worthless fellow."

"I married a man who is known as Benedict the Buccaneer."

"No; I have heard something of him. So he it was that killed the constable?"

"Yes."

"You wish to make yourself a widow then by killing your husband?"

"Yes, if you so wish to have it, and I shall do it."

"I will do all I can to aid you; but why do you wish a large vessel for the work?"

"He cut out the craft known as the Flagless Schooner, and is now cruising in it."

"Well, I see that you have something more to tell?"

"Yes, and he put to sea for one purpose."

"What was it?"

"He intended to go in search of an island whereon is buried a pirate treasure."

"By heaven! another one in the search; but it will prove fruitless."

"He has with him an aged seaman known as Old Mystery, who has been on the island, and with this very Indian, on one occasion."

"By Neptune! then the treasure is his."

"No, for the seaman is childlike, and does not know whether the island is one of the Chandeleurs, the Bahamas, or on the Florida Coast; but he has drawings of the island from two points, charts of the surroundings, and he may recall its locality in time."

"I hope not; but Benedict is now searching for it?"

"Yes, and keeping his crew quiet by piracy during the search."

"And you wish to run him down, capture his craft, and—"

"Hang him for his crime," she said savagely.

"And then?"

"Capture Captain Delbanco too, and avenge myself on him, for his cruelty to me."

"You are revengeful, Clo'."

"I have had cause."

"I do not blame you; but then?"

"My friend here, Pasquagoula, has promised to pilot me to the island and give me the treasure, so I will go shares with you."

"It's a bargain, by the Gods of War!"

"Clo', give me your hand, and consider me, yours unto death, and the red-skin's too."

"Why, we'll be richer than England's king, for that treasure is said to be worth millions upon millions!"

But, now to plan for a suitable vessel, for a good craft we must have, and I will stop this in-shore work, and can put on board a crew of eighty good men.

"You shall be my first luff, the Indian here the pilot, and we'll select our best fellows for officers."

"But the vessel is to be gotten first," said Clotilde.

"Yes, the vessel we must get."

"Pasquagoula have thought," said the Indian, speaking for the first time.

"Well?" and both turned toward him.

"The schooner Sea Owl now among Keys. Let Reef Pirates' small wing-boats go and take him."

"Right you are, Indian! I will run out my two schooners and four sloops, and pounce upon him like hounds upon a panther and worry him to death."

"I'll get the fleet ready for the work, and you'll have your revenge upon Delbanco first, Clo'," and Conrad departed to go on board his different vessels and prepare them for the attack upon the Sea Owl, which was then cruising among the Keys some leagues from the pirates' haunt in the Everglades.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TRAITOR'S FATE.

It was nearly sunset when the boat, sent after Oscar Osmond, returned to the retreat of the Reef Pirates.

The Pirate Commodore had started his men at work, on the different vessels, getting them in readiness for the cruise, and was again at his quarters talking to Clotilde and Pasquagoula, when the boat arrived.

"Go out of sight, Clo', you and the Indian, while I have a talk with this fellow," said Conrad, as he saw the boat approaching.

Soon the man came before him.

He looked pale and slightly anxious, for his arrest on board the guard-boat gave him to understand that the chief was angry with him about something.

"Senor Osmond, I sent for you for several reasons," said Conrad, as he eyed the man sternly.

"Well, commodore, I am here," was the answer, in what was intended for an indifferent tone and manner.

"I wish just to ask you, if you had any idea of the nature of the cruise on which Delbanco was going?"

"Yes, he intended to turn pirate, and at the same time search for the island on which it was said one of Morgan's treasure-ships had been lost."

"Did he know the island?"

"No, he did not; but he intended to begin his search among the Florida Keys, as I understood it."

"Is the Sea Owl a very formidable vessel?"

"She is a very fleet craft, remarkably so, and was a yacht at one time."

"Her guns are the best, and her general armament perfect."

"You were to be her first officer, I believe?"

"Yes, Captain Delbanco promised to make me his first luff."

"And you deserted him?"

"On the contrary, sir, he deserted me."

"Where?"

"He left me on special duty ashore and went off without me, and hence I came to seek service with you."

"What was the special duty?"

"To await the coming of his boats, and go with them to the schooner, which it was first his intention to seize, but which Benedict, the Buccaneer, anticipated him in cutting out."

"Was there nothing else?"

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Did he give you no other duty?"

"None, sir."

"Were you alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Osmond, I have been deceived by you, for you have lied to me, and were only prevented from being a traitor to Captain Delbanco by an accident which caused you to remain on shore."

"Now, sir, I am confident you would also betray me, and even now may be in my camp for that purpose, while I know that you meant harm to one who was defenseless and in your power."

"So now I will run no risks with you, but simply place you where you can do no harm."

Oscar Osmond turned pallid, and gasped forth:

"What do you mean, Commodore Conrad?"

"I mean, sir, that you are to die!"

"Die?"

"Yes, for I have already given orders for a file of seamen to come here and execute you; and when yonder sun disappears beyond the tree-tops, you shall die."

"Great God! Do you mean this?" and the man glared upon the Pirate Commodore.

"I certainly do, for I know you as you are."

Oscar Osmond looked like a hunted stag at bay, and stood for a moment gazing at the man who had pronounced the cruel sentence against him.

Conrad sat leaning back in his chair, directly before him, and gazing into his face, a cruel smile upon his lips.

Then, with the leap of a tiger upon his prey, Oscar Osmond sprung toward the chief, raising his hand, which clasped a hastily-drawn knife.

"Never will I die by your hand, for I came here to be chief!" he yelled in a voice that rung over the camp.

Leaning back as he was, and unarmed, it was impossible for Conrad either to rise quickly or defend himself, and he saw death almost upon him.

But suddenly there came a whirring sound, a cry, and Oscar Osmond dropped at the very feet of the man he had intended to kill, with an arrow buried in his temple.

Then Conrad sprung to his feet and turned to the one who had fired the death-shot, while he cried:

"Ha, Indian! you saved me that time, and we are friends for life."

"Me kill just in time," was the calm response of the Indian, as he withdrew his arrow from Osmond's temple and returned it to its quiver, all stained as it was.

"You did, indeed, and I was right in sentencing him to death, for I believe he has already been sowing the seeds of mutiny here, from the words he used.

"Well, Clo', you are avenged on that enemy, too, and Delbanco will come next, for we will soon sail for the Keys, where Pasquagoula reports him as being," and he turned to Clotilde who just then approached, shuddering as she gazed upon the form of the man who had been her foe, and whose fate had been so quickly met.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BATTLE OF THE BUCCANEERS.

IT was a rare disappointment to Delbanco to run out of port without Clotilde and Oscar Osmond.

He had intended, if successful in cutting out the Flagless Schooner—his first intention, the reader will remember—to run down opposite to the constable's cottage and kidnap Clotilde.

But the plan of Boyd Benedict had placed her in his power, and when forced to fly from the schooner, he had taken her with him.

He had taken a fancy to Oscar Osmond, and had left her without fear under his guardianship, but when he returned to the magnolias and found the maiden gone, her guard also, and the dead body of the constable, he did not look upon Osmond as a traitor, but believed that he had been discovered and attacked by the maiden's father.

What had become of the two he could not imagine; but he had no time then to tarry and make a search, so put to sea in all haste.

He had no well-defined idea regarding where lay the Treasure Island; but such a clew as he had he was determined to follow up.

His search should be thorough among the Chandeleurs, then the Florida Keys, and next the Bahamas, and in the mean time, like Boyd Benedict, he intended to keep his crew quietly committing piracies, for they were not to be let into the secret of the real object of his cruise.

First he sailed for the Chandeleurs, and every foot of those islands he examined most thoroughly, until he became convinced that the Pirate Treasure was not buried there.

He found traces of some one's having lived on several of them, and numerous indications that vessels had been wrecked there, but no treasure could be discovered there, or indications that any had been left there.

From the Chandeleurs he began on the Florida Keys, and it was while prosecuting his search among them that Pasquagoula and Clotilde had sighted his vessel on their way to the retreat of the Reef Pirates.

Following what clews he had, Captain Delbanco searched untiringly, now and then running off to capture a merchant vessel for stores and booty, and again returning to where he had left off, to once more begin.

It was just as he departed one morning before

dawn, to go upon one of these expeditions, that a canoe containing a single occupant lay not far from him, watching his movements.

The occupant had seen the vessel at anchor, heard the men called aboard, for they were camping on an island, and had then seen the craft stand away.

Going to the camp he found that it had been seemingly left for only a short while, for stores, shovels and other utensils had been left.

Having satisfied himself on this score he went back to his canoe, and as the vessel was now leagues away, raised his sail and sped away among the islands.

A run of a few leagues brought him to a group of islands in which were five small vessels, three schooners and two sloops.

It was the little fleet of the Pirate Commodore of the Reefs.

Boarding the larger of these vessels the occupant of the canoe stalked boldly into the cabin.

"Well, Pasqua," cried Conrad, calling the Indian by half of his name, as he had a habit of doing:

"What news?"

"Wing-boat have camp on island, and dig much, but wing-boat sail to big water."

"Gone! Too bad! too bad!"

"Not go stay long, for leave plenty on island."

"Ah!"

"Gone steal something eat from ship; then come back."

"Level-headed you are, chief; but, what do you think we should do?"

"Hide here and wait for enemy come back; then go in small boat at night."

"You are right again; but how will we know when he returns?"

"Pasquagoula keep eye on him."

"Good fellow you are, and I will load your canoe with the very best provisions and let you have a man or two with you if you wish."

"No, go 'lone."

"As you please, Pasqua," was the answer, and Conrad gave orders for Sea Horse, his negro cook, to supply the Indian with all he needed to eat.

This was done, and Pasquagoula returned to the island where Delbanco had his camp and awaited the return of the pirates.

A week passed, and one night, as Clotilde was leaning over the schooner's taffrail, she suddenly beheld a dark object come in sight.

It was the Indian's canoe, and a few moments after he sprang on deck.

"I am glad to see you back, Pasquagoula. But, come; the chief is in the cabin."

"Glad to come, and have news," answered the Indian, following the maiden.

"Pirates come back, and men in camp," he announced, bluntly, as Conrad turned to meet him.

"Splendid news, Pasqua; but do the crew of the schooner camp on shore?"

"Have to dig much and camp on shore; few on wing-boat."

"Well, shall we go in our boats, or run in on them with the fleet?"

"Too rough to go in little boat; have to take wing-boat."

"Well, we will get under way at once, and you shall be the pilot."

Half an hour after the little fleet was standing away from its anchorage and heading toward the island where lay the Sea Owl.

"Uncle, I have a favor to ask of you."

It was the first time that Clotilde had called him uncle, and the chief seemed pleased thereby, so turned quickly and said pleasantly:

"Anything you please, Clo'."

"The Sea Owl is a most beautiful vessel, and to fire upon her with heavy guns might damage her, so would it not be better to carry her by boarding?"

"You have some other motive for this, Clo', but I will do as you wish."

"Yes, I have another reason, and that is this: I have been thinking that the Sea Owl was rather small, after all, for the work we have cut out for her, as the schooner of Boyd Benedict is nearly double her tonnage; but with the Sea Owl a prize, I feel that I could make a most advantageous bargain for another vessel."

"And the other vessel, Clo'?"

"Trust that to me, sir, and only get the Sea Owl, and see if I don't make a good exchange, for I know well how much that little craft is thought of, and her draught and size render her better suited for the work of a coast-guard craft than the vessel I have in view."

"Well, it shall be as you wish, Clo'; but now to consult the Indian as to the best way to attack the cruiser."

Pasquagoula, when asked, said that the cruiser was anchored in a crescent-shaped bay of the island, and the little fleet could divide, and thus make the approach.

Two of the schooners were to go one way, and the flag-schooner and two sloops the other, and meeting opposite to the entrance of the basin, could thus run in together, as their approach would doubtless not be sighted by those on the Sea Owl.

This plan was adopted, and shortly after midnight the flag-schooner of the pirate fleet, with the Indian Pilot at the helm, stood into the little harbor, the other craft coming close in her wake.

All were under easy sail, the wind was light, and they felt certain of victory, for the watch of the Sea Owl seemed not to have discovered their approach.

But when within a couple of cable-lengths a loud voice was heard calling the crew to quarters; battle lanterns flashed on board; lights were seen on shore, responding voices came from off the island, and the alarm was general.

Bearing down upon the cruiser, as she lay at anchor, Conrad called his boarders to his side just as a broadside came from the Sea Owl.

It was well aimed, and it did considerable havoc on Conrad's schooner and the one immediately in its wake; but the Sea Owl, lying at anchor as she was, could not bring another broadside to bear, and the next instant the Reef Pirates' craft ran alongside and her crew leaped on board, just as the grapnels were thrown.

Almost at the same moment two boats from the shore came off, filled with men, and the fight became fierce and deadly upon the Sea Owl's

deck; but three more of the Reef Pirates' fleet came to the rescue, while the fifth craft, a sloop, put in to shore and sent off a boat to capture the camp.

Surprised, overpowered and with but one thing to do to save life, the pirates did it, and that was to cry for quarter.

But the Reef Pirates were a savage lot, and it was with considerable difficulty that their red work was checked, and then only when Clotilde ran into their midst, with Pasquagoula by her side to protect her, and cried in a stern voice:

"Hold, men! are you such cowards as to kill men who beg for mercy?"

This checked their course; the battle of the buccaneers was ended and Captain Delbanco was a prisoner to the girl who, a short while since had been his captive.

In dismay he started back, and cried:

"In Heaven's name what do you here, girl?"

"I am the chief of your victors, Captain Delbanco, and you are my prisoner," and turning to the Reef Pirates, she continued:

"Men, your chief lies dead on his own deck, killed by the broadside of this schooner; but with his last breath he told me to take his place, and I shall do so."

"Follow me, and I lead you to fortune, and take from about your necks the halter of the hangman."

"What do you say?"

A wild shout of approval greeted her words, and then ringing cheers were giving for

"Our Girl Chief, Captain Clotilde."

CHAPTER XXV.

A MYSTERIOUS WOMAN.

MIDDY HERBERT sat alone in his cabin.

He was buried in deep thought, and evidently it was of no very pleasant nature for his handsome face was clouded.

After the brig Sea Cloud had been given to him, by the mysterious padre, whom he had not seen since, the young middy had gone on a cruise in search of his stolen cruiser.

He was the more anxious to obtain possession of the yacht, as she had been a present to him from a former commander, and had, in a secret receptacle on board, some important papers and charts, with quite a sum of gold belonging to the Government.

The little cruiser was also better suited for coast service, than was the brig, and was as fleet as any keel afloat.

For these reasons, not to speak of his desire to recapture his stolen craft, Middy Herbert was most anxious to recapture the Sea Owl.

But he had made two cruises in the Sea Cloud without success.

The Sea Cloud was well-armed, manned and equipped, and he knew that he could come off victor, if he could get near enough to have a combat with the pirates; but this he had not been able to do.

On the morrow he would again start on a cruise after her, and he had merely run into port for fresh supplies.

"A lady to see you, sir," said Midshipman Rule entering the cabin.

"A lady to see me?" asked the young com-

mander very much as he might have done had he been told a pirate, had called upon him.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, ask her in; but what can she want?"

A moment after a slender, graceful form, clad in deep black, entered the cabin.

A heavy, somber vail completely hid her features from view; but a soft voice said:

"Do I address Captain Herbert, sir?"

"Middy Herbert, lady, but acting commander. Be seated, please."

She obeyed and a silence followed for an instant, and then the midshipman broke it with:

"How can I serve you, lady?"

"You were commander of the Sea Owl, which was cut out from her anchorage by Delbanco the pirate."

"I was, lady; do you know aught of her?"

"You prize the vessel very highly?"

"Most highly, I assure you."

"Which vessel would you prefer, may I ask, this one, or the Sea Owl?"

"This vessel is the superior of the Owl, lady, but the little schooner was the one I was placed in command of, and is the better adapted for the services I am called on to perform."

"Would you exchange this brig for the Sea Owl?"

"Willingly, if it lay in my power to do so."

"Does this vessel belong to the Government?"

"No, lady, for it was presented personally to me."

"By whom?"

"A padre."

"Ah, yes, one who has established a monastery, and does many good deeds to atone for his past sins."

"It is the same; but why your questions regarding the exchange of this brig for my Sea Owl, now in the possession of pirates?"

"It is in my power to make the exchange."

"In your power?"

"It is. What I say to you, Captain Herbert, must be in strict confidence."

"It shall be, lady."

"You must make me certain promises, and agree to certain terms."

"Name them."

"Well, sir, I will pledge you to exchange the Sea Owl for this brig on the following terms:

"I will sail with you in the brig as a hostage, and with one other person, my companion, who will serve as your pilot."

"He will take you to a rendezvous where the Sea Owl now is, and surrender her to you, with Delbanco and some thirty of his pirate crew, besides five small vessels, the Reef Pirates' fleet—"

"Hail do you mean this?"

"I do, and will carry out my part of the compact to the letter."

"That is, you will surrender the Sea Owl?"

"Yes."

"With Delbanco and thirty of his crew?"

"I will."

"And five vessels belonging to the fleet of Reef Pirates?"

"So I said."

"And their crews?"

"No, the Reef Pirate fleet you get crewless."

"And what becomes of them?"

"That is my secret."

"Ah! now what do I have to do in return, please tell me?"

"Give me possession of this brig, her guns and equipments."

"Well?"

"And allow me to man her with a crew that I shall take from the Reef Pirate fleet."

"I see now."

"And hang, before my eyes, ere you sail from the rendezvous, with the Sea Owl and fleet, the man Delbanco, to the yard-arm of this brig."

"And his crew?"

"You can do as you please as to them; but Delbanco you must hang."

"You hate him?"

"I have had cause."

"And what else am I to do?"

"Nothing for me."

"And what service will this brig be devoted to?"

"That you need not know."

"Well, this is certainly a most remarkable proposition."

"You are the gainer, for you get your Sea Owl, five other vessels, Delbanco and thirty of his pirates."

"True."

"Do you accept my terms?"

"I do."

"And pledge your word and honor as an officer to do as I desire?"

"Yes, I so pledge myself."

"Enough, get up anchor and set sail."

"And the companion you spoke of?"

"Came on board with me."

"Well, I am ready to start, and this cabin is at your disposal, lady, as long as you remain in the brig; but am I not to know your name?"

"It is not necessary, sir; but come on deck and I will tell my companion to take the helm and serve as your pilot."

They went on deck and half an hour after the brig was flying over the waters, with Pasquagoula, the Indian Pilot, at the wheel, for, as the reader has doubtless surmised, the veiled woman was none other than Clotilde, the pirate's wife.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PIRATE'S WIFE.

MIDSHIPMAN HERBERT was certainly greatly surprised, at the very strange lady passenger he had met in so mysterious a manner.

She had not once removed her somber vail, and, as the young officer gave her the full use of his cabin he had not been able to get a glimpse at her face.

She passed more time on deck than below, and she was often in conversation with the Indian, whose manner was ever most respectful to her.

As for Pasquagoula, Midshipman Herbert noticed that excepting to go to his meals, he cared not to leave the helm.

He seemed never to tire, and, during the first night's run did not leave the wheel. Was he being led into a trap, the young officer wondered?

There was one thing certain, and that was

he had been offered most excellent terms by the veiled girl, or woman, if she carried them out.

Thus the time passed until the Indian stated that the little fleet was not many leagues away.

It was night, and the cautious midddy was determined not to run into a trap in the dark, so gave orders to stand off and on, after approaching nearer to the island rendezvous, until daylight came.

The Indian Pilot held the helm at the time, and he said quietly, as though understanding the alarm of Middy Herbert:

"No have fear; all right—there."

"Still I prefer to await the dawn, pilot."

"I see that you mistrust me, senor," said Clotilde, who had come noiselessly up the companionway and overheard what had been said:

Middy Herbert answered frankly:

"Lady, I have no right to put my vessel and crew in danger, without thoroughly knowing what is before them."

"I wish to trust you fully, and have shown my desire to do so by coming; but I will not run in among a fleet of vessels without knowing what they are."

"They will do you no harm, senor."

"For myself, lady, I care not, for I take all chances as they arise, but for my vessel and crew I hesitate, so will await the dawn."

"Delays may be dangerous, senor," she said, somewhat nervously.

"Ah! you then are not sure yourself what we are to expect?"

"I am sure that affairs are as I informed you, senor; but still I left a wild lot of men without a leader, and they may have taken the reins in their own hands since my departure."

"But where is their leader, lady?"

"The leader of the Reef Pirates was known as Conrad the Pirate Commodore—"

"Ah! yes, a man I have long wished to hang."

"He has escaped you, senor."

"What do you mean?"

"He will never be hanged."

"Indeed! has he reformed?"

"No, he is dead."

"No! That daring, desperate man dead?" excitedly said the midddy. "You know this, lady?"

"I saw him fall, and it is his fleet I intend to surrender to you."

"But Delbanco?"

"He is there, also."

"And a leader in the place of Conrad doubtless?"

"No, he is a prisoner."

"To whom?"

"The Reef Pirates."

"Aha! a case of dog eat dog, is it, lady?"

"It was, Senor Herbert."

"And this Delbanco you are to surrender to me, as I understand it?"

"I am."

"With his men?"

"Some thirty of his crew."

"And his fleet?"

"The yacht Sea Owl and the fleet of Conrad the Pirate Commodore."

"You have great power, lady."

"In this instance, yes, senor."

"And you refuse to tell me who you are?"

"No, I will tell you," she said in a low tone.

"I will thank you," and he politely raised his hat.

Then came her reply, and a voice that was hoarse with feeling:

"Senor Herbert, I am a pirate's wife."

Midshipman Herbert fairly started at her words, but asked:

"And you betray your husband?"

"Oh, no, I avenge myself upon Delbanco, and use the Reef Pirates to further my end."

"And that end, lady?" asked Henry Herbert feeling a respect for the woman in spite of himself.

"To see my pirate husband hang," she hissed, and turning quickly descended into the cabin, while Midshipman Herbert, more than ever interested in the mysterious woman, turned to the Indian Pilot, in an endeavor to glean from him something about her; but Pasquagoula was dumb at all reference made to either Captain Clotilde or himself.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DELBANCO'S DOOM.

IN spite of a certain trust in his strange passenger, Middy Herbert felt a degree of anxiety also, and it kept him from seeking his rest, after being told by the Indian Pilot that the buccaneer fleet was not far distant from where the brig then was.

Pasquagoula kept his place at the wheel, and when Henry Herbert supposed his fair passenger asleep, she suddenly appeared upon deck.

Walking up to the Indian Pilot she said a few words to him in a low tone, and this added to the young officer's suspicions.

Walking aft to speak to her, she turned coldly and passed down into the cabin, her manner showing him that she had no desire to converse with him.

This added to the suspicions of the young midddy, and he secretly aroused and had the men all ready to come on deck at the appearance of danger.

As they were not very far from a group of islands, he rather expected, if danger came, it would appear in the shape of an attack in small boats, rather than by a vessel or vessels.

But the night passed away without any alarm, and, with the break of day Middy Herbert called the crew quietly to quarters, and ordered the Indian Pilot to stand toward the rendezvous where Clotilde had told him he would find the little yacht and Reef Pirates' fleet.

As the darkness faded away the outline of the island was sighted, and there the topmasts of the fleet were visible above it, looking like a grove of trees that had been riven of their branches by a stroke of lightning.

Nearer and nearer, under the Indian Pilot's guidance, the brig drew to the Reef Pirates' Island, Pasquagoula heading her round so as to run into the basin, and presently a man was seen in the fore-top of what the midshipman knew to be his stolen yacht.

The men were now all at their guns, the small-arms were ready at hand, and the crew, stripped for action, watched the grove of topmasts, alternately glancing at their young commander and

wondering if he intended to attack the very formidable-looking fleet in sight.

That the brig was seen by the pirates there was certainly no manner of doubt, and yet there appeared to be no excitement among them, for the vessels remained stationary and there was no setting up of sails or getting up of anchors.

As the brig rounded the point, and came in full view of the fleet at anchor, the pirates were all seen congregated upon the deck of the Sea Owl, and evidently watching the approach of the vessel-of-war with considerable solicitude.

Just then Clotilde came on deck, and said hastily:

"Will you run this flag up to the brig's fore, Captain Herbert?"

He took the flag and glanced at it.

"This is the flag of the Reef Pirates," he said, recognizing their well-known colors.

"Yes, and the men yonder will feel that all is right at seeing it."

"I do not wish to hoist a pirate flag above my decks, lady."

"It is only as a signal, that the crew may know you mean them no harm; but as you please, sir; only if they get alarmed and open fire upon you, do not blame me."

"Mr. Rule, run this flag up to the fore," ordered Middy Herbert, and as it fluttered out upon the breeze there came a wild cheer from the Reef Pirates.

The brig now ran in, and, taking in sail at the suggestion of the Indian Pilot, glided alongside of the yacht, the pirates standing in a line to receive her, and giving another cheer as the maiden was recognized, for, springing upon the bulwarks and grasping the shrouds, she suddenly revealed her face to the outlaws, though no one on the brig caught sight of it.

"Men, I have returned, and my terms have been accepted, for you are to be my crew, and sail with me on this brig, while your prisoners and the fleet are to be turned over to Captain Herbert, the commander of this American cruiser.

"Are you content?"

Every word was distinctly spoken, and one of the men, as the pirate's wife concluded, shouted out:

"Three cheers for Captain Clotilde!"

These were given with a will, and then, turning to Middy Herbert, Clotilde said:

"Senor, your fleet lies here, and your prisoners are in the yacht's hold."

"Thirty, you said, I believe, lady?"

"Yes, Captain Herbert."

"I will take them to New Orleans for trial, and—"

"Their captain, you know, Senor Herbert, is not to be tried."

"Ah! your terms were that he should be executed."

"Yes, senor, and immediately," she said almost savagely.

"Mr. Rule, be good enough to bring Delbanco, the pirate captain, upon deck, and then muster all hands to witness execution."

Midshipman Rule departed upon his errand, and Delbanco was brought on deck, his crew following him.

A number of the brig's crew guarded the pirates, while the crew of Captain Clotilde stood in silence looking on.

As Delbanco came on deck he cast his eyes over the different faces, and started as he saw that of Middy Herbert.

Then he beheld Clotilde and became utterly pale, while he said hoarsely:

"This is your work, girl!"

"It is, Delbanco, my work," was the calm reply.

"You are Delbanco, the pirate, are you not?" asked Midshipman Herbert, sternly.

"No."

"Who are you?"

"An honest man, and one whom a woman's revenge wishes to make suffer."

"I know you to be a pirate."

"I am not; but if I were, you have no right to hang me without a fair trial."

"I will dispense with a trial this time, and assume the right to hang you."

"You dare not."

"You have but ten minutes to live," was the stern rejoinder, and Herbert turned aside to look after the preparations for running the pirate up to the yard-arm of the brig.

"Girl, will you allow this?" cried Delbanco, furiously.

"It is at my request that you are punished now as you deserve," answered Clotilde.

"You have a heart of iron!" hissed the doomed man.

Clotilde smiled grimly, for she was becoming terribly callous in her nature after all that she had passed through.

"Are you ready, Mr. Rule?" asked the midshipman commander, wishing to quickly end the painful scene.

"I am, sir."

"Then put the noose about that man's neck."

This was done, Delbanco trembling visibly and muttering curses.

But he was heavily ironed, and could offer no resistance.

His crew stood in line behind him, white as ghosts, and believing that they, too, were to die.

The brig's crew looked on in stern silence, while the Reef Pirates were certainly uneasy, for if they were to escape death at the yard-arm then, they were well aware that they deserved hanging.

Pasquagoula, the Indian Pilot, stood by in utter indifference, seemingly, while Clotilde paced to and fro, her face still veiled, and her whole manner that of one who was moved by deep emotion.

"Your time is up, Delbanco, and may Heaven have mercy upon your guilty soul," cried Middy Herbert, impressively.

Delbanco would have spoken, but the midshipman said sternly:

"Haul hard there, men!"

Up into the air went the struggling pirate, loaded with chains, while Clotilde said in a low tone:

"Now I am avenged upon you, Delbanco."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

AFTER Delbanco was lowered from the yard-

arm, Middy Herbert turned to Clotilde, who still kept her stand upon the deck of the brig, and asked quietly:

"Lady, have I fulfilled my terms?"

"You have, senor."

"You are satisfied then?"

"Fully, Captain Herbert, so far as you can serve me."

"And now?"

"And now, senor, you can take your yacht, the pirate crew of Delbanco, and the fleet of the Reef Pirates, and sail for any port you desire."

"And you?"

"Shall retain the brig, according to our terms."

"And the Reef Pirates?"

"Shall be my crew."

"May I ask in what service?"

"That of revenge!"

Middy Herbert was struck with the savage manner in which she spoke, but said:

"You certainly are revengeful."

"I have had cause to be."

"May I ask who the victim is to be this time?"

"My husband."

Again did Middy Herbert start. The woman was then not willingly a pirate's wife!

She had wrongs to avenge, and meant to do it.

He felt more deeply interested in her, and would have sought to find out more regarding her; but she seemed to wish to end the conversation, and said abruptly:

"Now, senor, I will thank you and bid you farewell; but should you hear that Captain Clotilde, as my men call me, has turned pirate, set it down as false, for I seek only to avenge myself and no more, and I use this vessel and crew for that purpose only. Farewell!"

She bowed in a way that told him plainly she wished him to depart, and therefore he raised his hat and left the brig.

Her crew then came bounding on board the vessel, at a motion from her, and ringing cheers went up for:

"Our Lady Chief, Captain Clotilde!"

Sail was at once set upon the brig, which stood out of the basin, the Indian Pilot at the wheel, and glancing astern Clotilde saw the yacht soon after follow, with the pirate fleet, on board of which were prize crews, in her wake.

While the fleet of the young middy stood away for New Orleans, the brig under Captain Clotilde was put on a course to find Benedict the Buccaneer, for upon him now turned all the hatred of the injured woman.

It was no easy task, she well understood, to find Benedict, but Pasquagoula knew the waters of the Bahamas well, and thither she went, for there she expected to find him, searching for the lost Gold Island.

Thus days passed away, and then weeks rolled by; but untiringly Captain Clotilde held to her search.

At last, when cruising one day there came the thrilling cry from aloft:

"Sail ho!"

It was the schooner of Benedict the Buccaneer, as all now saw, and orders were at once given to head toward the pirate.

Coming on deck, Captain Clotilde it was seen had prepared herself for the combat, for she had cast aside her vail and was armed with a cutlass and pistols, while, in the sash about her slender waist was also a long-bladed knife.

Her face was as white as that of a corpse, but her eyes were as bright as diamonds and she issued her orders in a voice that had a threatening ring to it.

The schooner had also sighted the brig, and stood toward her, evidently mistaking her at once for a merchant vessel.

But this thought was soon dissipated by a shot from the Sea Cloud, and the schooner would have put away in flight, for Boyd Benedict's desire was not to fight, had not an island prevented his escape without a combat.

Thus forced to it, he beat to quarters, and a hot and fierce action was begun, the brig gradually edging nearer and nearer, until the Indian Pilot skillfully laid her alongside of the schooner, and the Reef Pirates boarded and drove all before their impetuous onslaught.

A short while only, then, the combat lasted, and the victory was won for the brig, and Boyd Benedict lay dying upon the deck, with Clotilde bending over him.

In broken tones he told her of his love for her, how her father had forced him to kill him in self-defense, and how disappointed he was at not finding her on board the schooner.

"And now, Clo'," he continued in a low voice, "I die by your hand, for I saw you fire the shot that gave me this death-wound. I love you, and the treasure I would have found, but find the grave of a pirate in the deep sea."

"Farewell, Clo', and believe that I forgive you."

"No! no! you shall not go alone, for I will die with you. See! we die together!"

With this she placed a pistol to her heart, pulled the trigger, and with the report sunk down upon the breast of her pirate husband.

In dismay her crew stood looking on, while the twilight shadows gathered about them.

Then there rung out the cry of:

"Sail ho!"

Then, right upon them came the Sea Owl, her men at their guns, and boarders ready.

"Me no good here; me go too," cried Pasquagoula, and with a bound he sprung into the sea and disappeared beneath the waters, just as the Sea Owl ran alongside the brig and threw out grapnels.

Over upon the Sea Cloud's deck came Middy Herbert and his gallant tars, and, taken by surprise, the Reef Pirates fell back before them and soon cried for quarter, and the daring young middy made a double capture of the brig and the schooner, and set sail in triumph with his prizes back to port.

But he buried first, upon an island, poor Clotilde and her pirate husband, and bemoaned the fate of the unhappy and revengeful woman, while he also regretted the mysterious disappearance of Pasquagoula, for with the death of the Indian Pilot it was said the secret was forever lost of the whereabouts of the Pirates' Island and its buried treasure.

THE END.

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